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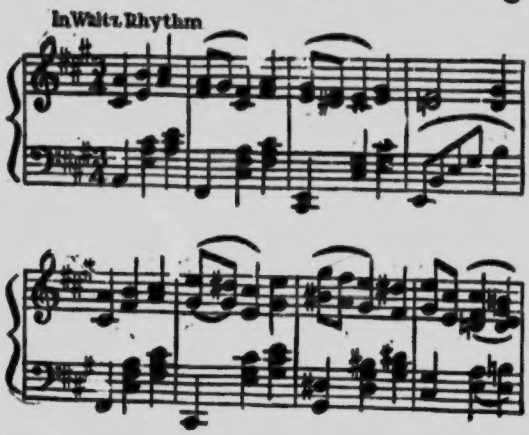
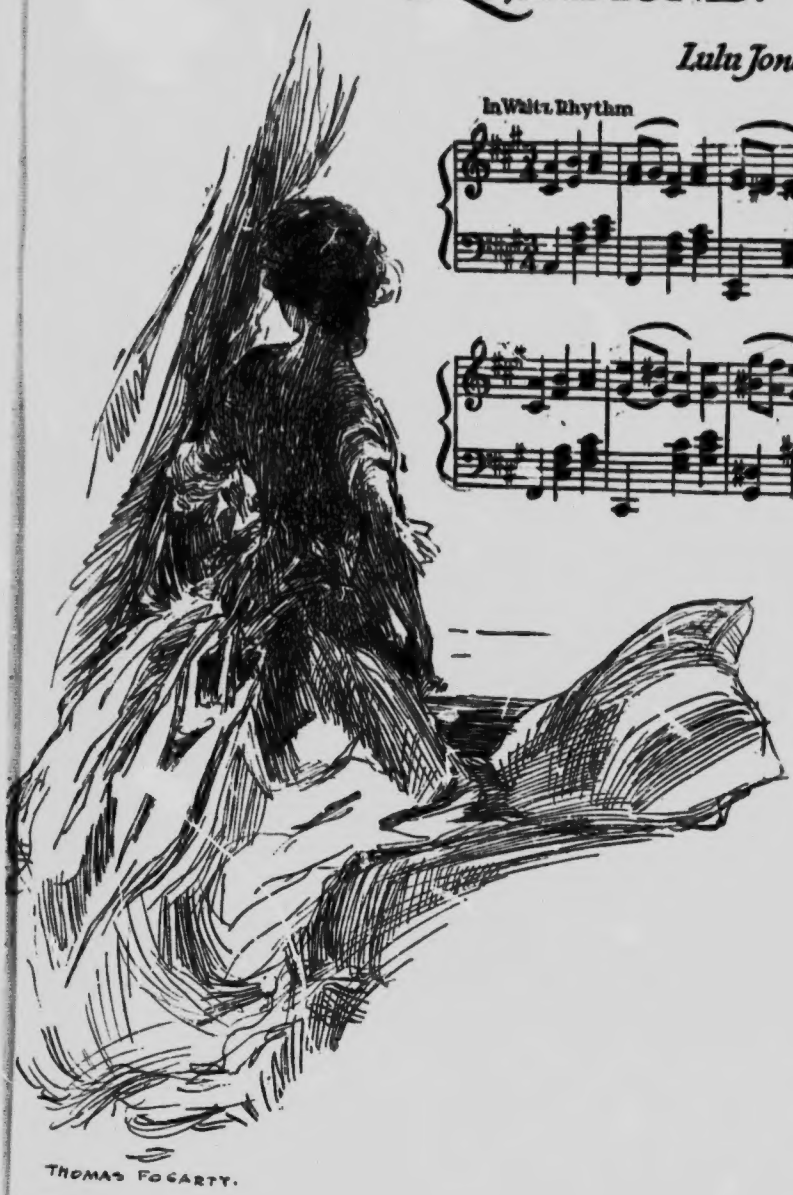
"GOOD MORNING, ROSAMOND!"

CONSTANCE SKINNER

"GOOD MORNING, ROSAMOND!"

Lulu Jones Downing





"When one is to have perhaps only one wonderful day, decision how one shall spend any moment of it is important"

(See Page 24)

"GOOD-MORNING, ROSAMOND!"

BY

CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER

ILLUSTRATED BY

THOMAS FOGARTY

TORONTO
McCLELLAND, GOODCHILD & STEWART
LIMITED

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"GOOD-MORNING, ROSAMOND!"

"GOOD-MORNING, ROSAMOND!"

CHAPTER I

NÉGLIGÉS were unknown in Roseborough. Even at seven in the morning, which was Rosamond Mearely's hour for greeting the new day, the ladies of Roseborough did not kimono: they dressed.

Young Rosamond Mearely might be—as indeed she was—the richest and fairest woman in Roseborough, and the widow of a gentleman whose name the hamlet and countryside mentioned still with the bated breath of pride; but she would no more have dared to appear at breakfast before her housemaids, the imposing Frigget sorority—Amanda, aged forty-nine years "come Michelmas," and Jemima, forty-seven and three quarter years—in what they would have pronounced (and condemned as) a "wrapper," than she would wittingly have committed any other irretrievable *faux pas*.

The mother of the Frigget sorority had guided the first adventures of the late, distinguished Hibbert Mearely about the by-ways of Trenton Waters, his

birthplace, in the infantile push-carts of his period—that is to say, fifty-odd years before this morning when his young widow slipped a decorous print gown (lavender with black floral design) over her dainty, white roundness and the whalebone and batiste article that confined it, and descended to her fourteen hundred and eightieth solitary breakfast. It was four years since Hibbert Mearely's departure. His faithful nurse was slowly preparing to follow him; she lay bedridden in Trenton Waters. Her two daughters, who had been brought up to serve him, still dominated his household.

Rosamond saw them now, as the stairs circled to the door of the large living room where summer breakfasts were spread. They were tall, multi-boned women with straight, thin, gray hair—drawn sheerely to a polka dot at the back, which one, or at most two, hairpins controlled—and clad in skimpy, dark, cotton dresses, well starched and designed to reveal every puritan angle. They stood at opposite sides of a long, black table. The table was one of Hibbert Mearely's antiques (a ticket attached to the foot gave its date and history); its "early Seventeenth" carvings were hidden now by a cloth of gleaming white damask bearing Mrs. Mearely's breakfast. Rosamond's glance, by habit, travelled in a direct line between her female grenadiers to the wall where a life-size portrait, in oils, of the late

master depended. Outside the wide-open doors, the sunlight filtered through the overlacing trees and kindled the proud red of the dahlias to flame. A little breeze, vagrant and wilful, danced through the garden and set all the leaves to clapping their hands. Rosamond sighed. She flitted through the doorway and down the huge room, sedately, to her place.

"Good-mornin', Mrs. Mearely, ma'am."

"Good-mornin', Mrs. Mearely, ma'am."

"Good-morning, Amanda. Good-morning, Jemima."

These salutations never varied. Rosamond spread her old-fashioned damask napkin on her lap slowly with a sense of apprehension. Amanda had her own manner of establishing an "atmosphere." Out of the corner of her eye Rosamond perceived that she was more unbending than usual this morning.

"I was a'most a-comin' up to see if you'd ben took sick—it's five after." Amanda's tone was dry and accusative.

"Is it? Perhaps I may have dawdled a little . . . I mean," hastily, "I think one of my laces knotted."

"Seven *sharp* was a'ways Mr. Hibbert Mearely's breakfast hour"—Jemima's tone was impersonal and final—"as we'd oughter know that cooked and served it to him twenty year, not countin' the long time of his young an middle manhood when he was

trapsein' the world after them curios an' antics of his'n."

"Antiques, Jemima," the lady of the house corrected.

"That's wot I said," stubbornly.

"Your porridge was dished at seven sharp ' was perfec' for that hour; but five minutes makes a world of difference in the nature of a hot bowl of porridge."

"I'm sure it will be delicious, Amanda," her mistress murmured. Her tone was timid and placating.

"Speakin' of lace knottin'," Amanda continued, "Mary Caroline was the only one of us girls that was inclined to fat, an' maw a'ways made her let 'em out when she took 'em off, nights, so there'd be no time wasted in the mornin'."

"It was my *boot*-lace, Amanda," milady protested.

"Mebbe 'twas—an' mebbe 'twasn't. It's loosenin' em overnight that counts—both boots *an'* stays. An' so Mary Caroline found—leastways if she didn't want maw to wallop her for bein' late—sloth bein' one of the seven deadly sins maw could not abide. Mary Caroline was a natural temptation to a high-tempered, energetic woman like maw—she bein' inclined to fat."

Mrs. Mearely motioned the porridge bowl away with a chill gravity.

"I'd like my toast and eggs now. Of course I do not suppose you mean anything personal, Amanda,

by your repeated allusions to your deceased sister's physique. Nevertheless I may say, without lowering my dignity, that, although I am not thin and—and—er—flat all over like some of Roseborough's women, I am not fat. I am not even '*inclined* to fat' as it appears your—er—walloped sister was, according to your description."

Mrs. Mearely's attempt to reduce Amanda Frigget, domestic, to a proper sense of her relation toward the mistress of Villa Rose, failed miserably. The haughty eye of the would-be *grande dame* wavered from that forbidding countenance and weakly sought refuge in the colour-blend of buttered toast with yolk of egg. Alas, she had given Amanda the sort of opportunity which never passed unimproved.

"You're not fat as compared with *some*, but you've got a general curve to you, which is on'y to be expected in the daughter-of-a-farmer's figure." Amanda proceeded, uncompromisingly, to make the Frigget position on curves and non-curves even plainer. "Now Mr. Hibbert Mearely's sisters, both what married small but choice titles, was so lean an' aristocratical you could count the ridges in their backbones—on'y you wouldn't of persoomed that way on born ladies. But look who their father was—an' Mr. Mearely's father, too! A perfessor an' clergy that had his descent from the middle ages of Henery Seven!"

"No wonder Mr. Mearely felt he could afford to be condescendin'," Jemima put in, as she removed the tea cosy. "But I don't s'pose he'd ever have set his a'most royal foot onto ploughed an' harrowed groun', if he hadn't of seen you that day in the gate of your father's farm in Poplars Vale. That's when he forgot about Henery Seven an' went back to the soil—a man that was past fifty an' had seen all the museums of Europe!"

"Strange—strange, indeed!" Mrs. Mearely hissed softly, striking a small silver knife into a butter ball with intent to wound.

Amanda took up the theme.

"An' how did it all come to happen? By the accident of him, a absen'-minded man, takin' the wrong turn at the cross-roads as he come up from fishin'! The han' of fate pinted him to Poplars Vale 'stead of Roseborough. An' there was you, eighteen—an' allurin' no doubt, but 'umble an' uncultured—a-sittin' on your paw's farm gate, but lookin' higher. What a talk it made in these parts! When I says to maw, I says, 'Mr. Mearely's goin' to marry Rosamon' Cort of Poplars Vale,' she took to her bed for the day with a spell. Such a shock it was to her to think how him as she'd used to trundle had forgot his station."

"By marrying a butter-maker?" Rosamond's voice was sharp at the edges now.

"We said then—maw an' Jemima an' me (Mary Caroline havin' passed beyon')—we said, 'We'll never remember again in this life that Mr. Hibbert Mearely's fiancy's mother made *an' sol'* the first *roun'* fancy butter pats in this distric'.' That's the way all Trenton Waters an' Roseborough felt bounden towards the Mearelys. That's, in special, the way His Friggets felt bounden toward Mr. Hibbert Mearely."

"No doubt he is very grateful to you both, and is waiting eagerly to reward your devotion"—she paused also at the "cross-roads," so to speak, ere she gestured a vague direction and concluded—"wherever he is."

If her inflections were strangely pungent and her phraseology speculative, the angle of vision sought by her too large, cloud-flecked, sky-blue eyes was absolutely right. They gazed ceilingward. Amanda folded her hands across her apron. She also looked upward.

"No doubt," she repeated, solemnly.

"No doubt;" Jemima echoed her sister's sepulchral accents, and folded *her* hands and looked at the same bit of the gold cornice. If they had concentrated on this point long enough in rapt faith—who knows?—they might have materialized there the shade of the departed collector of antiquities to demand of them, sternly, which careless hand-

maid with intrusive mop had nicked his Florentine gilding.

"The raspberries, Jemima, please. I shall always wonder why it is that . . . (cream, please) . . . the very persons who wouldn't for worlds . . . (and powdered sugar) . . . recall the fact that Hibbert Mearely's widow's mother once sold butter . . . (are you sure this is sugar, Jemima? It looks suspiciously like salt) . . . are the very ones who are always reminding me of . . . the *butter, please.*" She finished, tartly.

Jemima hastened to pass the hereditary slur.

"Well, ma'am, I wouldn't go to say that exac'ly." Amanda studied the question. "But them what thought so high of Mr. Mearely kind of wants to help you remember what he done for you."

"Ah! that is it, eh?"

"Yes. An' you bein' a widow an' havin' to put all his blue blood in the tomb—when you hadn't enjoyed it but a year an' four month—we feel like it comforts you to remin' you that, even if *you* come off a farm in Poplars Vale, your diseased husban' didn't. *No, Sir! He* come off of Henery Seven!"

An odd little squeak pierced through Rosamond's damask napkin. It terminated hastily in a cough.

"May I ask, ma'am, when Mrs. Witherby stopped in here yesterday mornin' did you happen to be wearin' them *white* cuffs an' collar with your lavender

'stead of the black watered ribbon ones as you've worn for nigh a year?"

"Yes. Yes, Amanda, I believe I did have these on yesterday—for the first time in the daytime. You know I've worn *all* white with flowers—in the evening."

"It's doin' it in broad daylight that causes remark. Oh, I'm not forgettin' my place an' criticizin'. It's all correc' enough. You done your eighteen months crape an' one year plain, then your six month black 'n white. Then come your year of lavender with black ribbons, an' now it's time for white or even light colours, if you're desirous, an' none should objec'. But Mrs. Witherby's tongue is like a dog's on a huntin' mornin'; it's that easy set to waggin' an' anticipatin'. Jemima, you it was overheard her remarks. Be so kin' an' repeat."

Nothing loath, Jemima obliged.

"Mrs. Witherby says, says she, 'well, you mark me,' says she, 'Mrs. Mearely will not remain long a widder. It'll be Judge Giffen or Wilton Howard afore Christmas.'"

"Oh! the gossip!" Mrs. Mearely snapped indignantly. Amanda nodded sagely.

"It was them white muslin triminin's what done it," she averred. "She says it afore her niece, Miss Mabel, who all Roseborough knows is jus' a-pinin' an' a-languishin' for Mr. Howard; and Miss

Mabel she goes white as your napkin—which ain't so white, but considerable eggy now you've had your sof' boileds. I could a'ways tell your napkin from Mr. Hibbert Mearely's wherever I'd pick 'em up—be it in church or tavern—for Mr. Mearely he could comfort his appetite without a smear. But, of course, *he* was born to refinements. Well, it's too bad, m. 'am, but gossip is what you mus' expec' from now henceforth."

"Yes," Jemima went on to illustrate, "all Roseborough is a-waitin' breathless to see what you'll do nex'—you bein' the widder of a aristocrat but the chil' of a farm."

"Standing, so to speak, with one foot on the throne and the other on the churn?" milady murmured between bites at a large berry.

"Wilton Howard's too young—he's on'y aroun' thirty-five," Jemima continued. "Though him bein' a relation of the departed has a sort of sentimentality to it. It'll be the Judge, if ever she do take unto her another spouse. Him an' Mr. Mearely was intimate bach'lor frien's; an' the Judge is a highborn man, specially on his mother's side—'Doubledott' bein' one of our proudest names. An' he's jus' fifty-three years old, what is the exac' age Mr. Hibbert Mearely was when he lifted you from the farm gate to the altar. It'd be a'most like gettin' married to Mr. Mearely all over again—specially as the Judge not

havin' any property, you'd be livin' on here with him."

This graphic prophecy of a second state of connubial bliss affected Mrs. Mearely strongly. She burst into explosive sobs.

"Yes! yes—yes! It would be just the—the same as marrying Hib—Hib—Hibbert Mearely all o—o—over again! And I'm only—only—not quite —twenty-four. Oh—h—h!"

She swept the dishes back ruthlessly, overtoppling the hot water pitcher—Amanda saved the cream just in time—and hid her face on her black-flowered, lavender sleeves with their white cuffs (which, being amorously interpreted by the Roseborough gossip, had provoked this sorrow) and sobbed as stormily and shamelessly as if she were still little Rosamond Cort pouring out the briny aftermath of punishment in the hayrick behind the dairy.

"There, there, ma'am," Amanda said, gently. "There, there. Who could know better how you feel than His Friggets, what has been to Hibbert Mearely fifty year—mother an' daughters—all that hired help can be in the life of any highborn man?"

"Who could know better'n us?" Jemima obbligatoed.

"It's like a sacrilege to you to think of putting any man, even Judge Giffen, acrost the table from you under that portrait. To take a secon' spouse seems

to some natures a'most indelicate. Ma'am, while His Friggets is conductin' Mr. Hibbert Mearely's late home on earth, gossip can say no word agin you, for I'll promise you as no young sheeps-eyed, gallantin' male critter will ever get inside the walls of Villa Rose to blaspheme your sacred mem'ries. It'll be the Judge or none—an' I ain't decided yet even as the Judge . . ." She stopped short.

From the little anteroom which connected the living room with the formal dining room came a tinkling.

"A telephone in Mr. Hibbert Mearely's antic an' aristocratical home is what I'll never get accustomed to." Amanda drew her lips down in displeasure. "*He'd* never have permitted it."

"Answer it, if you please, Amanda." Mrs. Mearely lifted her head with an air that became her well, despite her tears.

"Answer it, Jemima," the elder sister commanded, noting, with a glitter of satisfaction, that her alleged "mistress's" eyes flashed angrily. By such subtleties did Amanda remind milady, when necessary, that, while "His Friggets" would do whatever was to be expected of servants in Villa Rose, neither would take personal orders—above all, if given as such—from the farmer's daughter of Poplars Vale.

"I don't mind obligin' you, Amanda," Jemima responded, with a certain pointedness.

"There won't be anyone there to answer, if you

don't hurry," Rosamond said sharply. Perhaps it was the liberating influence of her white cuffs and fichu; perhaps it was because the early morning sun and breeze on a midsummer day have a rapture of their own which is communicable and urges gay defiance of all convention; but, whatever the cause, Rosamond Mearely was aware that, although she had been irked aforetime, never had she felt the oppressiveness of the Frigget sorority as she felt it at that moment. Inwardly she was thinking:

"I couldn't discharge them. They wouldn't go. Or, if they did leave, they'd make it impossible for me to live in Roseborough. But if a wicked tramp were to come by and I paid him a lot of money, and he murdered them for me . . . ?"

Mrs. Mearely's assassination reverie was cut short by woeful wails from Jemima at the telephone.

"Oh! Mercy! Amanda! oh . . . !"

It was only on extreme occasions that Amanda indulged in profanity. She did so now.

"Jemima! What in all sassafras is the matter with you?" she demanded sternly as her sister reeled into the room.

"Oh! Oh! Maw's had another stroke! We're to go to her bedside immejit."

"Another stroke!" Amanda echoed in a ghostly voice. "It's the *end*. Poor Maw! *Another stroke!*"

"Oh, poor Mrs. Frigget. Oh, poor Amanda! Oh,

poor Jemima! But it isn't the end. She'll have lots more." Rosamond, all tender consternation, endeavoured to console. "It's only her second, and they always have *three*, at least. Dr. Wells says he knew a patient who had seven."

Failing to stop their cries by hopeful words, she took practical steps. She ran to the open door and called:

"Blake! Blake! Oh, there you are. Blake, you must harness the mare at once and drive Amanda and Jemima to Trenton. Their mother is ill!"

"Good-mornin', Mrs. Mearely, mum. Ill, is she? In course, she's ill," came in a slow, rumbling voice from some aged masculine out of sight. "She's been bedridden nigh three year."

"Hush, Blake. You must not be so unfeeling. She's just had a stroke."

"That's them sleezy, new-style, board-roof cottages. They'd oughter kep' a green umbreller over 'er bed."

"It isn't a *sun*-stroke, Blake! It's a—another kind. And you must harness, at once, and take her daughters to her."

"Oh, yep. If the wuss is a-goin' to 'appen, them two Friggets has got to be thar to see it. Good-mornin', Amanda and Jemima."

Blake, gray-haired, sixty, and stooped but hale and ruddyfaced, limped to the threshold.

"So yer maw's nearin' 'er end, is she? That's very sad—I know to a *t* 'ow you feel—if so be ye're feelin' *bad*—coz my rheumatiz is twistin' me like a peavine this mornin'. I'm four square yards of twinges. 'Owever, I'll 'arness the mare an' she'll get us over to Trenton lickety-split—judgin' from the way she's been actin' sence daybreak. That is, if she don't fling us all over the bridge."

"Yes, yes! That'll do, Blake," Mrs. Mearely interrupted impatiently. "People could be dying while you're talking, you know. Hurry, now! hurry!"

"Oh, whatever'll you do without us? Somethin's mortally sure to happen!" Amanda moaned, torn between two duties. "Somethin' a'ways goes wrong in Mr. Hibbert Mearely's home when His Friggets leaves it. Oh, be sure and sen' right away for Bella Greenup to tidy up an' get your dinner."

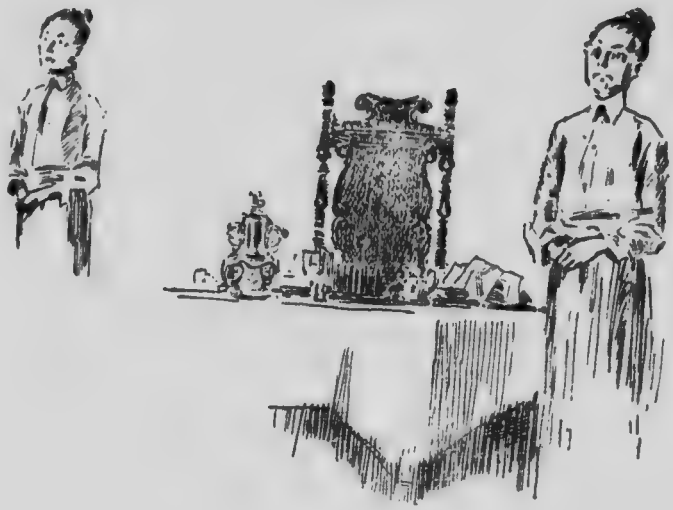
"Nonsense, Amanda. What *should* happen? Nothing has ever happened in Roseborough yet. Nothing ever *will* happen in Roseborough. Leave everything and go at once to your mother."

"Thank you, ma'am," Jemima said between sobs. "It's kin' of you. If you'll telephone to Dollop's Drugs, he'll sen' to Bella Greenup for you—him bein' sweet on her an' more'n willin' to take her messages."

At the end of a half hour Rosamond saw them driven off down the winding hill road, the gray mare

snorting and kicking up her heels as if she had not, some time since, reached years of discretion.

"Florence is not acting in the least like a *Rosborough* mare," she commented aloud. "She positively unladylike this morning. Oh, dear, I do hope their mother will get better—the poor things!" Then, in spite of her genuine sympathy, a giggle escaped her. "If it weren't such a sad occasion it would be rather fun to see Florence kick a fraction too high and roll 'His Friggets' down the hill. They are so unintentionally amusing that there are times when I could almost like them if only they wouldn't call themselves *that!*"



CHAPTER II

UNLESS she meant to clear away her breakfast dishes herself, her first duty was to send for Bella Greenup. She turned her back on both telephone and dishes, however, and ran up the stairs and into her room. It might be supposed that she intended to begin the day's work by making her bed; but she spared not a glance for its crumpled state. Some secret purpose, brought to definite shape as the carriage had disappeared, possessed and thrilled her.

There was a window seat formed by a huge, carved rosewood chest. Rosamond dropped on her knees before it and began to search through the layers of coloured frou-frous which were neatly sandwiched between pieces of smooth, white linen. Pink muslin bags containing dried rose leaves, and bunches of dried lavender blossoms woven together in loose checker pattern by lavender and white baby ribbons, were tossed among the rainbow flounces of a profuse wardrobe.

She rose presently with billows of perfumed satins and lace flowing over her arm. Her cheeks were rosy not only from her exertions but from the

excitement that stirred her small round bosom, and also kindled her eyes till they glowed like the blue sparks of a driftwood fire. She skimmed across the dull-polished dark oak floor to the mirror. This latter was the one bright article among the sombre furnishings of the room. It was a huge thing with an ornate gold-enamelled frame that finished in a top of turrets, flower-twined trellises, and one-stepping cupids. It reflected the room for Rosamond in fan-shape, with herself the Watteau figure in the fan's centre.

As she unfastened the top button of the black-sprayed lavender gown she began to hum a little song. They were tiny cut jet buttons, and no doubt suggested to her that time could be saved and the adventure hastened by a good pull. Two sharp tugs ripped them all out of the button-holes; but two of the jet balls had shot, like stray bullets, into the unknown, ere the hated garment reached the middle of the room, having been propelled thereto by the farmer's daughter's toe.

The gown she selected in its place was of soft satin, thin and sheer as silk, and of a lilac hue. The skirt, made in two panniers and short round train, draped over an Irish lace petticoat. The round-necked bodice and short, close-fitting sleeves were of the lace. From the front of the girdle, silk folds went over the shoulders and hung in sash-ends at the back. It

was a frock of costly simplicity, witnessing that the departed collector of curios, antiques, and *objets d'art* had been no niggard in the matter of supplying appropriate cases for his purchases.

The other gown, shimmering and smelling of pink roses and trailing with silver gossamer, she shook out and hung upon the high back of some medieval Louis' chair and draped it with linen to protect it from dust. Presently she returned to the mirror to survey, at her delightful leisure, a sight that would have caused His Friggets to swoon with apprehension, so boldly did it register new claims on life and on youth's inalienable right to inspire love.

The figure reflected was not diminutive. Without being tall, there was height enough, one would say, to insure the eyes a good view of golden horizons and near heavens, and the arms an easy reach to the honeysuckle clusters or the ripe purple plum hanging low by its own weight. The lines were long and not fragile but well knit at knee and thigh, at shoulders and supple waist; the curves were not less sturdy than graceful and sinuous, like the outlines of a young, white, birch tree, where poetic beauty harmonizes with limber, enduring strength. The tenuousness of high breeding, which His Friggets so admired, was wholly absent from Rosamond's body. The well-made feet looked equal to miles of meadow running; and the finely rounded, firm, white arms would not

tire under the pressure of market baskets. Yet there was a daintiness about her—in her postures and her movements, in the set of her throat and of the chin raised to thrust her eager face a little forward—but it was the daintiness of the field, not of the hothouse.

Both *La France* and the wild rose are roses; both permeate their worlds with fragrance and are something alike in colour, but no one would compare or contrast them for purposes of criticism. One, the product of selection, is the aristocrat of horticulture. The other is the queen of rusticdom, as unspoiled as she is undisputed in her sway, the passing centuries of garden fancies and fads having influenced her not at all. She is not the less lovely because she is sturdy and able to bear wind and weather.

Rosamond Mearely, *née* Cort—like the wild rose—proclaimed that the cottager's environs, and not lordly estates, were her native ground. She was a willing little daughter of the earth, with the earth's promise in her; and her halesome, country-bred beauty challenged with a frank admission that it would have shone as radiantly in a sun-bonnet, patched gingham apron, and bare feet. This, despite its present wrappings of Lyons silk and Limerick lace and its background of some ancient, royal reprobate's furniture; and also despite the fact that the mirror which imaged the eager, wistful face under its bright hair had once reflected (so 'twas

said) the coronets and the *hauteur* of the princesses of the House of Orleans.

A joyous flush tinted her satiny skin which was innocent of even the knowledge of powder. Thoughts of freedom came to her and made her breath stir quickly. They promised her things vague and splendid and she felt a flutter about her heart like the wings of birds waking for the morning flight. She was beautiful, she was rich, she was young; and for one whole day, at least, she was her own mistress. A laugh rippled through the sombre old curio shop of a bedroom. She swept herself a curtsy and called gleefully to the contented-looking apparition in the mirror:

"Good-morning, Rosamond!"

She fairly danced down the stairs.

CHAPTER III

IN THE living room she paused for a conference with herself.

"Let me see," she said, aloud. "Amanda said I must send for Mrs. Greenup at once, to manage the house till they come back. So I shan't do it! I'll be my own Cinderella—sometimes in the kitchen and sometimes my ladyship. This may be the only day I'll ever have that is all mine. So it *must* be—it's just *got* to be—*wonderful!* and nobody shall spy on it. What shall I do *first?*"

She dropped into an enormous padded chair and stared thoughtfully at the farthest wall. When one is to have perhaps only one Wonderful Day, decision regarding how to spend every moment of it is important.

Even immersed—as she was—in delicious hopes, she could not remain long unaware that her eyes were fixed upon the countenance of the man who had brought her to Villa Rose. The childish glow, the eager make-believe, which had transformed her into a girl of eighteen again, faded from her eyes. In their place came a wistful gravity, the look of one who has probed and queried and accepted certain harsh facts,

yet refused to let them wholly dispel the fancy and optimism which alone can make a life of facts livable. She accosted the portrait.

"You were very good to me, in your way, Hibbert Mearely; but you never allowed me to forget how greatly you had honoured me. It pleased you when I called you 'sir.' You didn't marry me for love of me—you took me as if I were a—a—bunch of wild flowers, to give just the right contrasting touch of rustic simplicity to your fine house. No, not home. It never was a home—only a museum."

She looked about the large room. It was ornamented with scores of pieces of bric-à-brac, with jars, images, plates, trays, boxes, gathered from all parts of the globe. They were artistically arranged, making pleasant spots of colour, and might have looked as if they belonged there and together—but for the tags. Every article, no matter what its size—even the thimble which, it is safe to say, Mary Stuart never *did* wear—had a ticket attached to it. Mr. Mearely had spent most of his time, when at Villa Rose, in writing on these tickets, in his small, pointed calligraphy, the fictions of dealers most pleasing to his egotistical and highly artificial mind.

"I have been only another curio with a ticket on—" Rosamond said, accusingly—"the rustic trifle to offset the art of all ages. You even told me that was why you married me and thought I should feel

complimented. What higher compliment could a woman desire than to be regarded by her husband purely as an art object? And I agreed—at first. I thought that was finer than just love—the love of farm lads and lasses. But, oh sir, the farm lads and lasses know something more precious than any treasure that has ever come into Villa Rose. Everybody in Roseborough said that the butter-maker's daughter married you from ambition, but it wasn't only ambition. It was glamour!"

The wistful, far-away look came into her eyes again, despite the little smile at the corners of her mouth—a smile as if she mocked herself for a past foible, the while her eyes denied that it *was* past.

"Yes, it was glamour. I had known nothing but humdrum farm poverty—but I believed fairy tales. I thought it would be good to be the wife of the distinguished Hibbert Mearely—to live in Villa Rose among the antiques—among Cleopatra's knitting needles and Madame Pompadour's stuffed lizards, with a knob of Charles I's unwise, not to say wooden, head for the handle of my shoe-horn!"

A short sharp laugh came from her, unmellowed by the spirit which had bubbled in her since His Friggets' departure. It suggested that, unless she laughed, she might cry.

"There wasn't a single woman in the district who wouldn't have jumped at the chance of marrying

Hibbert Mearely. So I—yes, sir—I jumped! And you never knew that I wasn't happy. You never knew because you were not interested to inquire. You of the portrait, there—do you accuse me of ingratitude? Are you saying that you richly dowered a beggar maid who gave you nothing but the beggar maid in return? Let us discuss that. You made me believe it, and I did believe it, until lately. But it isn't true. I spoiled nothing that you gave me; but you!—I gave you my dreams, all the fairy tales I'd imagined, all my ideals and faith and all that I knew of reverence. But these things weren't art objects, so you despised them. Well, I suppose you'd say I gave you no gifts at all, because I gave you what you had no taste for! Enough said for my gifts. What do I owe you? Let us talk of *your* gifts—without glamour—heart to heart."

Her hands smoothed down the crease in the hem of the satin pannier, and she smiled.

"You dressed me very beautifully and extravagantly; but it was only to delight your eyes—not to make me seem more lovable to you. Love was too common—almost too vulgar—a sentiment to find lodgment in the Mearely breast. I didn't mind your being fifty-three, sir. That was like being wooed by a prince with powdered hair—say, the Fourth George, 'the first gentleman in Europe.'"

She nodded emphatically over this.

"Yes, sir; indeed his nickname suited you, too, as well as his nature; for you both had wonderful manners but no hearts at all. What other gifts? Many. I remember, sir, and gratefully, that you taught me all I know of fine airs—how to walk, as if I'd never paddled on flat bare soles through the creeks and meadows; how to talk in drawing-room accents without the ill-bred emphasis of excitement. 'Don't rattle the milk pails, my love,' is what you used to say, when my zest for life keyed my tones above the Mearely pitch and tempo. How you enjoyed seeing people writhe under your ridicule! It put you into a pleasant mood again, presently. You taught me what music to admire, and what to consider with pursed lips and lifted eyebrows; what books, modern and classic, should lie on a cultured woman's table. But I remember, too, that you taught me these things by means of sarcasm that cut to the bone; and my tears you called 'squeezing out the buttermilk.' You had a sort of placid cruelty, sir, that always made the butter-maker's daughter cringe. And only a few days before you died you told me you feared I was 'irredeemably *bourgeoise*'—because I had 'so much emotion.' And the last gift?"

A tremor of rebellion went through her, and her eyes flashed.

"Villa Rose, and your small, safe fortune! Villa Rose and the Mearely money willed to me in terms

that make me a prisoner all my life! So I think, on the whole, I've earned my right to this day. I have paid your memory the last jot of respect demanded by Roseborough. For four years I have worn hideous blackish clothes which would have caused *you* to swoon with horror had the angels allowed you to lean out of heaven to observe me. Now, I am going to be *young* and dress like a bird of paradise! And—and . . ."

In a trice she threw off the mood that had held her there. The grave analyst disappeared. It was a young creature thrilling with the joy of life who leaped up and threw her arms high above her head and laughed.

"Do you know what this 'irredeemably *bourgeoise*' bird of paradise is going to do now? She is going out into the hedges and the river grass and along the highways; and she is going to twirl her finery about, and shake her hair out in the sun, and call—and call—till her true mate comes to her! And he'll jump down off his horse—or the wind, or a heron's back—and he'll catch me up in his arms, because *he*, also, is irredeemably *bourgeois!* And he'll say . . . he'll say—'Good-morning, Rosamond!' 'Good-morning, Rosamond!'"

The sound of her name this morning gave her exquisite delight, as if it introduced her to a new being; as if, indeed, she had discovered that this

new being, herself, contained in profusion all the elements of the romance she coveted.

She sing-songed her matutinal salutation in the theme of the little minuet she had hummed, from time to time, since her pleasant interview with the Orleans mirror, and danced herself out with it to the garden.

The portrait of the late possessor of this rebellious bit of country bric-à-brac was an excellent essay in flesh painting of the realistic school. It had no psychic qualities. Therefore it did not change its tints or take on shadows when Mrs. Hibbert Mearely, renouncing the life of an art-object, wafted out on rustic love-adventure bent. The morning sun, so kind to the fresh countenance of the farmer's daughter, dealt very sincerely with the gentleman in the picture. Its arrow rays, shot across the wall, lent neither warmth nor softness—only pointedness—to the long, thin head, and the nose, chin, and lips that were all long and thin and curved. Nor did the sunshine kindle the prominent, cold, pale eyes which looked out with condescension upon a world of humanity that mattered little, collectively or individually, to the self-contained self-sufficiency of Mr. Hibbert Mearely, aristocrat and amateur collector of antiques.

One long, thin hand held a small gold-painted box from which James II was supposed to have pecked

his after-dinner comfits. With a fine impartiality, the other hand rested on the head of a cane of English oak and silver, said to have been given to William of Orange by Mary, his spouse. Indeed, she may have given it to him for, as all history knows, the intense but plain-faced lady put her Stuart pride in her pocket and wooed her dour Dutch Bill, assiduously and submissively from A to Z, before she finally convinced him—to his belated joy—that they were two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one.

It may not be amiss to mention here (in whispers) that the distinguished dilettante—whose taste and knowledge of arts past and present had been that of an amateur and a gentleman without vulgar taint of professionalism—had once (only once and *never again*) sought the opinion of an expert on his collection. This "brutal person," as Mr. Mearely had characterized him on the only occasion thereafter, when he permitted his name to be mentioned in his presence, found the Orleans mirror and the Louis chair to be of the *periods* claimed, but doubted that princesses had ever looked in the one or kings sat in the other. He approved the jade Buddha and certain bronzes, potteries, and two pictures; but as to the rest, he had said, amid detestable chuckles:

"Well, sir, my advice to you is, don't ever charge the public admission to your private bazaar—Villa

Bizarre, eh?—for the law would be down on you for obtaining money under false pretences. And I can promise you that all your 'royal' pepper pots and powder puffs and poodles and *petits pois*—if they sold for what they're *worth*—wouldn't bring in enough to pay your fines."

"I have not a *poodle* in my collection," Mr. Hibbert Mearely retorted with icy dignity, and showed the "brutal person" the door.

Perhaps it was not strange, therefore, that little Rosamond Cort, equipped by Nature from the beginning to be a connoisseur in happiness, should have found out that the crown of wifehood bestowed on her by Hibbert Mearely was something less than royal, and that the joys which had glistered to her through the window panes of Villa Rose were golden only on the surface.

CHAPTER IV

DOWN the hill and down the valley, where the crossroads pointed east to Poplars Vale and west to Roseborough, and the low, gray stone bridge with its mossy ooze led over the winding river toward Trenton Waters, three miles north, stood a stone tower. In it an old ship's bell hung, which, so report said, had once rung meal hours and lullabies and other clock stations for a captain and crew whose gory barque flew the "Jolly Roger." The aged pensioner, who collected the tow-path tolls, rang the strokes of the hour on this bell from six A.M. until six P.M., and, so closely did the [illegible] curving hills advance to smile upon each other from both sides of the running water that they made a channel for the sound—like a great, twisted, golden horn—so that the bell-tones, rung out at the crossroads, were heard at Roseborough and at Poplars Vale and even rolled their echoes, when the wind was kind, upon the town of Trenton Waters.

Nine o'clock! Rosamond heard it pealing as she reached the terrace.

"I must hurry to find whatever it is I am looking for," she said, "because my Wonderful Day won't

wait. It will move on, hour by hour, just like any other day."

The house was on a jut of the hill, sheer above the gravel road and midway from the summit. The road must make a long detour about the grounds of Villa Rose ere it could continue its progress round and over the hilltops and on toward more modern and populous districts of Old Canada. At the foot of the incline was the village proper, occupying three streets in triangle about a combined courthouse, police station and gaol, the latter seldom visited even by the constables. On one street corner the post office stood, flanked by a few small houses. The other two streets shared between them the business buildings of Roseborough; such as Bilkin's meat market and hardware store; Miss Jenny's millinery and dressmaking establishment; George Dollop's drugs, stationery and lending library, with John Dollop, plumber, and James Dollop, undertaker, adjoining, and Horace Ruggle of the telegraph office next door; and Brandon's stables and feed store.

In going over the hill's brow and on to the vague unknown, the road led past Charleroy College whither the lads within twenty miles came to acquire knowledge. The residential portion of Roseborough, comprising about sixty houses and gardens, spread about the hillsides between the village and Charleroy.

The sun fell aslant over the garden and the orchard,

as if indeed it had cast a golden net about Villa Rose to snare the willing lady thereof in a witchery from which she might never escape. To decide that this was to be the great day of her life, a day of splendid adventure, was one thing; to make it so—to make any day a day of adventure in Roseborough—was quite another. Pondering ways and means of conjuring up romance, she fluttered about among the blazing dahlia beds like a huge lavender butterfly.

"Oh!" She stopped suddenly. "I shall not deserve my Wonderful Day if I don't take Mrs. Lee her flowers and her fruit, as usual."

She ran back to the verandah and picked up a willow basket containing stout gloves and shears and returned to the flower beds. She lingered only a moment or two among the dahlias. Beyond their haughty glory lay the rose garden, a radiant and random half acre spilling forth every tint and perfume known to the rose family. Here Rosamond's shears went to work busily. She found delight in the task, for she hummed again the little minuet theme which she had recomposed into this day's salutation to herself.

When one is young, not only with the fearless years but with the brave desires of youth and eager for fairy tale happenings, so that every other sentence begins with "I wonder!" one must talk;

and if fate has set one in a high and lonely place with no young, imaginative twin soul to companion one's dreams, then one must talk to oneself—not merely in silence but with the uttered phrase. Rosamond talked to herself habitually.

She was musing aloud now:

"I wonder how it would feel to own all this—Villa Rose and its gardens—with love, and then to lose it—and love, too. Mrs. Lee did. I'm afraid I couldn't be sweet about it, as she is." She concluded presently that in such circumstances she would even feel resentful when flowers were brought to her from the garden that had once been hers.

She pictured Mrs. Lee in thought as she would see her presently—seated in her bit of garden, knitting, or perhaps indoors, lovingly sorting and dusting the precious (and, it must be confessed, prosy) manuscripts written by her husband during his forty years as professor of literature at Charleroy. She would hear the gentle voice greeting her lovingly—not because she was the rich Mrs. Mearely but because Mrs. Lee instinctively greeted all the world lovingly. Under the white hair and dainty, white lace cap, the kind eyes, which had seen seventy years of life—with its human sun and shadow—go by, would beam out of the delicately wrinkled face with a delight in the flowers' beauty and fragrance as spontaneous and young as youth itself—the spirit which

discounts time because its habitation is with the good and the eternal.

"Maybe it is because she never thinks of herself that she has never found out that she hasn't things any more."

Mrs. Lee's ability to be happy, even after fate had bereft her of everything, was a subject full of unusual interest for Rosamond this morning. By some art this lonely woman, past her seventieth milestone, managed to make every day of her life her "*wonderful* day." The song of her "Good-morning!" came out of a deep-toned, divine joy which neither age, poverty, nor grief could blur. The wistful look was in Rosamond's eyes again as she passed out of the rose garden and into the orchard on her way to make her daily offering.

The orchard lay higher than the garden and the house. Rosamond went on up rustic steps, made of earth and roots, that led between irregular lines of pear trees weighted to the ground with their promise of brown and golden fruit. She made her way to a huge cherry tree, ran nimbly up the ladder, and covered the bottom of her basket with large, red-cheeked, white cherries; then, jumping down, she hastened on up the remaining steps into a small grass plot surrounding a tiny cottage. A beech tree took up its full share of the grounds and, close beside it, as if in friendly converse, rose the rustic, vine-

clad top of a well with wet bucket hung high on the roller.

Mrs. Lee sat in a rocker beside the well, knitting. Her ball of yarn was filliping about the sward under the paws of a white kitten whose smudgy face betrayed a nature so obsessed with the entrancing amusements of a woollen tangle that the duty of the daily ablution was wholly forgotten.

"Oh, Mrs. Lee, I'm late; but here they are." Rosamond held out her basket.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Mearely. How you spoil me, my dear! What lovely roses—oh, and dahlias! —dahlias of the very hue of life itself, the unquenchable crimson flame. How bravely and confidently they give themselves to the sun and blend with its rays! And cherries, too!"

Rosamond laughed.

"Now, Mrs. Lee, how can you pretend to feel such delighted surprise when you knew perfectly well that I'd bring them to-day just as I always do?"

"Ah, my dear, that is the very secret of happiness." She paused to pick up a dropped stitch, and Rosamond, eager for data on this subject above all others, asked quickly:

"*What* is the secret of happiness?"

"Why—don't you know? It is to anticipate only what you know will surely happen. Then your every desire comes to pass. And the surprise you feel is not

so much surprise, after all, as a kind of charmed wonder that life is so beautifully arranged."

"*Is* life beautifully arranged, Mrs. Lee?" Rosamond took the basket from her friend's lap, where it interfered with the stocking's progress, and set it on the grass. She sank down on the broad, rustic seat which surrounded the well's rim.

"Is it *not?* I am sure you feel that it is. To you, in particular, in spite of the one great grief, life must seem like a fairy tale. I must pause in discussion of this infinite theme to remark upon your appearance, my dear. You look ravishing this morning. What a beautiful frock! I know that it has been hard for you to put away the last black ribbons. Although it is just what he would wish, it seems to you like wilfully forgetting the beloved one."

She laid a comforting hand lightly for a moment on Rosamond's. Rosamond, remembering the manner in which she had discarded the black-garnished, lavender dress, drooped her head quickly to hide alike the little blush of shame that tinted her cheeks and the wicked twinkle that brightened her eyes.

"It is so fortunate," Mrs. Lee went on, "that there are no 'styles' in Roseborough. In Roseborough all your lovely frocks will be as fashionable now as when you bought them, four or five years ago. Miss Jenny says that she does not know what this generation is coming to, because, even in Trenton Waters,

they are beginning to ask whether a garment or a ribbon is 'in style' before they buy it. Miss Jenny says that she has seen some of those so-called stylish hats, and garments of various kinds, and that she is willing to take her 'solemn oath in court'—as she expressed it, being very much moved—that a few scissor-snips would have laid the whole in ruins. 'Mrs. Lee,' she said to me, 'when Jenny Hackensee sews a bow on even a child's hat, or a bone button on the band of a genteel woman's flannel petticoat, my *conscience* is satisfied that it will *never* come off!' Poor Miss Jenny. She fears that the Roseborough ladies may forget her worth and run after follies. My dear husband used to say that that trait was one of the charms of Roseborough—namely, the loving regard each person in the community has for the general *morale*."

"Yes, that trait *is* very marked in Roseborough." Again Mrs. Mearely's drooped head hid a twinkle.

"It rejoices me to see you in that dainty lilac and white. It is just as if the fragrance and tints of spring had lingered to make midsummer more bewitching."

"Are you going to make me vain again to-day, as you always do?"

"Nonsense, dear child. Does expatiating on the beauty of a rose or a brook make it vain? Beauty is one of heaven's choicest gifts, and is always to be

admired gratefully. How foolish must any fair woman be who allows herself to become vain—as if the beauty admired were *her* possession exclusively, and not a free gift to the eyes of all beholders! She might as reasonably be conceited about holding up a candle in the dusk."

Rosamond put out a hand and stopped the knitting for the moment. "You were going to show me how perfectly life is arranged. I need to be shown." She laughed.

"Perhaps I did, too, at your age. And I was. For I married a remarkable man and life became for me at once very simple and large—something like the process of Nature's unfoldment under sunlight. Professor Lee's spirit was just that—a mellow sunshine, which made for growth in those who lived within its radius. A bright and searching spirit it was; for it revealed to you the weeds as well as the grain, but in such a way that you were not hurt or humiliated; your only feeling was a sense of freedom, of relief that a danger had been pointed out, and that you had therefore escaped it."

"Perhaps it would not be so difficult to give up one's faults if one were told about them in that way. One would have no reason for trying to excuse them."

"Ah, that was it exactly! He always said that when you deprived people of the feeling of personal possession in their errors you took away their only

reason for clinging to those errors. But for this egoism, we would all see clearly enough how indefensible are many of the traits we justify. My husband would have refused outright, if he could, to believe there was any evil in the world at all. He *did* insist that it was no true part of any person. That was why he could help others so wonderfully in their moral struggles, because he never censured, never expressed a personal anger, only pointed out the wrong as if it were—as, indeed, he regarded it—an outside thing trying to fasten itself on the unsuspecting individual. He used to say that moral victories over temptation were all-important—because they registered something permanent, a degree of progress won—but that defeats, though pitiable, were not deeply important, because they were of the moment only—the next hour *might* see victory; *some* hour *must* see it."

"It must have been wonderful for his students to be trained by him—I mean, to be taught first to look at life and themselves by a man who had such a deep faith within him. But weren't you always busy keeping bad people from taking advantage of him?"

"Sometimes; but far less often than you would think. I came to see that this spirit of my dear husband's, so far from bringing deception and imposture upon him, really contained its own protection against these things. Those who were unworthy of his inter-

"Mrs. Lee sat in her rocker knitting. Her ball of yarn was filliping about the sward under the paws of a white kitten"

est soon eliminated themselves. He never seemed to guess why they went—but saw them go and wished them well."

"To live for nearly fifty years with a man like that might make me also believe that life is beautifully arranged. But I am not convinced this morning."

"You are wilful!"

"I know it. There will be only twenty-four hours in this day and I need at least twice that." She paused.

Mrs. Lee smiled as she said: "You flit from one subject to another like a bee after honey! My mental wings take slow and reasoned flights. I cannot follow you. What am I to make of your last inconsequential spurt through the air—that, for you, life would be rightly arranged if this particular day could have double hours? If so, why?"

Rosamond laughed.

"Don't let me give you 'nerves,' Mrs. Lee. I know I do lack sequence, and that, to the life companion of a professor of literature, must be very trying. I can begin things wonderfully and I know the ending I *want;* but I can't fill in the middle part. The middle is just dots and dashes."

"Principally dashes," Mrs. Lee smiled.

"Principally. This time, though, there *is* a connection. To-day is to be my *Wonderful* Day. So, if life really is beautifully arranged I must find it out

before to-morrow. And even a forty-eight hour day is hardly long enough for one's *only* Wonderful Day."

"Oh, youth, youth! With all life before it, it must still invent limits for itself and tragic 'ifs' and 'buts' and 'perhapses.' Why must to-day alone be wonderful? *Every* day has its wonders."

There was no answer for a moment; then Rosamond leaned over and kissed the elder woman's cheek—a fragile bit of pale pink and ivory modelling, faintly impressed with many tiny lines. She knew that she could not uncover to Mrs. Lee's eyes all the remote reasons for her mood of this morning. She who had worn her weeds in loving sorrow and resignation must not be told of the young heart beating its rebellious tattoo for long irksome months, under crape and plain black, black and white, and lavender with black trimmings—nor of the hoydenish Nick which had cast the last stage of woe from her forever.

It seemed to Rosamond, then, that the cynic touch of disillusionment, and not the mere passing of time, was what aged; and that, according to such calculation, she was years older than Mrs. Lee. Twenty-four's responsibility was to guard the *couleur de rose* for Seventy! Her thoughts culminated in the inward exclamation:

"It makes a difference, even in one's *age*, what sort of a man one marries!"

Aloud, she said:

"You see, I called this my 'Wonderful Day,' and put on this frock to celebrate it. So I must *make* it wonderful, mustn't I?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear, and all the midsummer fairies will help you," her friend answered.

Mrs. Lee was placidly and patiently unmingling her kitten and her wool, which had revolved and resolved themselves into one untidy ball with a miewing centre.

Two sounds broke upon the lull in conversation.

Near by clattered the hoofs of the letter carrier's pony rounding the hill's turn to the front gate. Far down by the river the old bell rang its song of ten o'clock into the mouth of the golden horn valley, and the tones—muted but round and perfect—floated up across the hillside gardens and carried, even here, their separate theme dimly above the murmurs of wind-rippled leaves and dripping bucket.

"Morning, Mrs. Lee. Morning, Mrs. Mearely, ma'am."

Mr. Horace Ruggle—who was the mail carrier twice daily when he was not the telegraph agent, and *vice versa*—blinked perspiringly over the gate. Mr. Ruggle was stout—deliberately and tyrannically stout, no doubt his equine would have said, had there been a bit of speech instead of a bit of steel in his mouth—and whatever he did was done with gusty effort.

"Good-morning, Mr. Ruggle. Is it possible that you have a letter for me?" Mrs. Lee queried, putting her knitting aside and rising to the rare occasion. Rosamond ran forward to receive it.

"One for you and one for Mrs. Mearely." Mr. Ruggle put the letters into Rosamond's hand. "Yours has come quite a ways; but Mrs. Mearely's is just from Poplars. It'll be from her folks, likely. Mebbe her mother's took sick or her sister's children's caught a epidemic; or, more likely yet, has had a accident with that new farm machinery."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, I hope not!" Mrs. Lee looked upon him with gentle disapprobation as if she considered his attempt to rival the literary imagination of Edgar Allan Poe wholly out of tune with a midsummer morning in Roseborough. "Do tell me there is nothing of the sort, Mrs. Mearely, I can't enjoy my own missive until I know. Mr. Ruggle has alarmed me."

"Telegrapher and postman," Mr. Ruggle wheezed, mopping his huge cheeks, "I'm the Bad News Syndicate. I made that anecdote first along in the 'nineties,' when the newspaper at Trenton joined the news syndicate and gave me the idea; but it's a joke that's always good. Back about six years ago, I added something to it that's made it even better. It's this: 'If I carry bad news and don't know it, who carries worse and knows it?' Answer: the

undertaker.'" He took his own time and told it to the bitter end despite Mrs. Lee's polite, but none-the-less quite marked, attempts to prevent the sombre jest's completion.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Ruggle. You are fond of your wit, we know; but while you are entertaining us, think of the impatient ones elsewhere waiting for their letters."

"Right you are, ma'am—impatient for their doom, never thinking as how what they don't know won't hurt them." Mr. Ruggle drew his pony's head out of the greenery about the fence. "Bad news from Poplars?"

"Oh, no, not at all." Mrs. Mearely gave him a nod that meant dismissal.

"It is only a line from my sister, Mrs. Lee, saying she can't come to me for a week."

"Should think you'd be looking in your own envelope, ma'am," Mr. Ruggle hinted to Mrs. Lee. "It's come quite a ways."

"Not just now; I must find my other glasses first, so I shall wait some time."

"Well, *you* may, but *I* can't!" The nonplussed Mr. Ruggle masked his disappointment with a facetious air. "Good-day, ladies." The over-freighted pony jogged on up the hill.

"Dear, dear, I wonder how many thousand times Mr. Ruggle has repeated to me that unpleasant 'anecdote' of his, as he insists on calling it." Mrs.

Lee shook her head, with a mild perplexity that any one should evince a taste for such humour.

"Dreadful person!" Rosamond concurred. "Wouldn't you suppose that an ordinary sense of the fitness of things would keep a fat man from being morbid?"

Mrs. Lee laughed heartily.

"I'm afraid I have been guilty of a tiny fib. Although I generally use my other glasses for reading, I do not positively require them. Still I do feel that I should not be *compelled* to share my mail with Mr. Ruggle." She slipped a knitting needle under the flap and opened the envelope deftly. Presently a murmur of delight caused her guest to say:

"No epidemics or accidents in *your* letter, either! I heard you purr."

CHAPTER V

IT'S from Jack—our Jack—and he is coming home!" Mrs. Lee's deeply set, dark eyes were shining, her cheeks flushed; her voice, keen-toned with happiness, denied her three score and ten years.

"Oh, I hardly dared to believe it when he wrote months ago that he would come! But he *did* mean it—the dear, dear lad. Listen: 'I will walk in upon you on the morning of the fifteenth.' The fifteenth? why, that will be to-morrow! To-morrow morning! Oh, think of it, Mrs. Mearely! I, too, am to have my 'wonderful day'; and it is to be to-morrow!"

"Who is coming to-morrow? It should be a remarkable person indeed to inspire all this joy."

"Oh, he is! But you shall see for yourself. It is Jack Falcon."

"And who is Jack Falcon? His hawk-like name makes me none the wiser!" Rosamond laughed in asking.

"Oh, you will not recall him at all. You must have been a small child when he went away. Oh, dear, I am so excited! To-morrow morning! Come in with me, dear friend, and do help advise me what

preparations to make. And let me chatter, too; for, really, if I cannot let out some of this exhilaration in words, I fear I shall just puff and puff and go up like a balloon."

"No, you won't, for I'll hold on to you!"

"Oh, come in, dear, and help me—advise me."

She drew Rosamond's hand through her arm.

"I shall love to help in anything that makes you so happy. And to-morrow, early, you shall have fresh flowers and fruit—and everything that Villa Rose can supply. If only Amanda and Jemima were there to cook things! But they went to Trenton for the day," she added, not wishing to cloud Mrs. Lee's joy by a recital of His Friggets' sudden sorrow. "But there! *I* can cook! I'll bake a cake. It will be fun to do it."

"Oh, my dear! will you? Oh, think of that!" Mrs. Lee fluttered in ahead of her. "I must decide which room to give him."

"You haven't any room. He'll have to sleep in the well!"

"Ah! I have it! yes! I've just thought that I can use the little room as a dining-room and give Jack the dining-room because of the two sun windows looking down toward the river. He will want a sunny room to work in."

She led the way into the dining-room where light and colour reigned even in the woodwork and dra-

peries. Purple, pink, and blue morning-glories, burdened with bees, peered in at the broad, low windows.

"To work?" Rosamond repeated interrogatively.

"Yes—I haven't told even you yet. It has been such a secret! It is the professor's manuscripts. I have arranged them. Oh! it took months to sort them. Look."

She drew aside the scrim curtains before a low bookcase. The shelves were packed with notebooks and loose pages covered with small, even writing, all lying in neat piles.

"Sit down, my dear, and let me tell you all about it."

She pressed her guest into a little wicker chair trimmed with rose chintz, and then sat at the table, herself, with half a dozen of the manuscripts before her. Marking a place with her forefinger, she continued:

"You see, since my dear husband went away, these have been my companions."

"He must have written a great deal that no one else knew about. Why were they never published?"

"Ah, that is the secret, dear! They *will* be published. These are all thoughts of his, fruits of experience, little jottings on life and human character as he had observed them, descriptive and philosophical essays: the result, as he said, of having been

taught faithfully and diversely by youth for forty years."

"Of being taught by youth!" Rosamond repeated. "Oh! what things youth *could* teach if age would only let it." Her eyes sparkled.

"He often spoke of it in that way, as if *he* were the pupil, and a very fortunate one, of all the hundreds of boys who passed through his hands. And I know that he hoped, in these writings, to give back to his boys—in their maturer life, when they could appreciate it—some of the gold of their youth."

"Did he care so much for all of them?"

"He cared for every living thing. In loving any individual it was *all* life that he loved with all its potentialities. It came to me that if I could only publish these notes and essays I would thus extend his influence although he is no longer personally here. I wrote to several of the boys about it. (I must still call them 'boys,' although some have their gray and their bald spots, no doubt—and their whiskers!)"

"So Jack Falcon, dear filial soul, is bald and whiskered," Rosamond murmured. "I might have known it."

Mrs. Lee, examining the manuscripts, in a search for some special article or paragraph, did not hear her.

"Some of the boys were interested, and some I thought were a trifle indifferent; but Jack wrote that

he would come home to help arrange and edit the scattered notes into coherent form. He said he was willing to give a year to the task, if need be. And—think of it—he was ever so far away in southern Europe at the time! Somewhere in those excitable Balkans."

"The poor old thing was probably scared to death in the Balkans and grasped at the opportunity to get to a quiet spot," went through Rosamond's mind, but she said, aloud: "He has a good, loyal heart, evidently, and deserves that I bake him a cake."

"Indeed he does. Though he was a dreadful cake-thief as a boy. I had to wrap my cakes in a towel and hide them in my bonnet box. He would go barefoot on long tramps through the valley and then come into the house, after we had retired, and eat up everything. The dear boy!"

"He wouldn't have done it a second time with *my* cakes! The idea of crawling in through windows at midnight hunting for food! *I'd* 'dear boy' him!"

Mrs. Lee laughed.

"Oh, dear, how I *am* rambling on! It is the excitement, and not knowing what to tell you first. But I fear that authentic news of Jack Falcon could never be grouped in *orderly* fashion, for he himself was a very disorderly, lawless person. But *so* lovable!"

In chattering breathlessly, as she was, her slender fingers had been searching rather inefficiently among

the leaflets; but now it appeared that she had found what she wanted.

"Here's his letter, pinned to this little prose poem about Roseborough."

"He writes poems about Roseborough?"

"Oh, no, no! It is the professor's. You see I copied the little gem about our dear old town and enclosed it when I first wrote him about publishing. I wanted it to awaken the home desire in him. He has never married—it is too bad. Wait . . . oh, here it is. He says:

"I remember that names and dates never stayed in your head, Mother Lee, even simple Anglo-Saxon names. So I won't burden you with the extensive and excruciating hereditary title of the royal personage who just now employs me at a handsome salary in laying out a recreation garden for his peasants. You would weary and faint before you reached the end of it! Suffice it for your pride to know that I have given to this royal personage the little article about Roseborough. It came about, naturally, one day in the garden that I read it to him. He was charmed with it, touched. So I, of course, let him keep it. He has translated it into his own jawcracking language [Jawcracking' is in brackets—the naughty boy![], and has made an illuminated copy which hangs in his music room where he spends most of his time.

"There, my dear! Is not that something to be proud of? To think that my dear husband is even helping unpronounceable personages in those dreadful Balkans!"

Rosamond's own cheeks were rosy from sympathetic thrill and she joined warmly in the elder woman's delight.

"Oh, Mrs. Lee, how lovely! I should think you would be so proud that you would refuse to speak to poor commoners like us! You have known that for weeks and never told it! *I* should have gone up and down Roseborough with a trumpet."

"Oh, you must not tell it even now! I wish to keep it until the right moment, when I can give it out in such a way that all Roseborough will feel that the honour does not exalt *me*, in a personal way, but is theirs as much as mine."

Rosamond cocked her head, impudently.

"Afraid Mrs. Witherby will scratch?"

"No, you naughty girl! But Roseborough, having the communal spirit so strongly, does not take kindly to personal exaltations. I have learned to respect this sensitiveness."

Rosamond's eyes twinkled again, as she listened to Mrs. Lee's charitable paraphrase on local jealousy.

"What do you suppose it could have been, about Roseborough, that appealed to the Balkan person?" she asked. "Try to imagine Roseborough in the Balkans!"

"Do you know I, too, wondered about that at first? Then I saw how natural it was—and felt that I had been stupid not to comprehend it at once.

What *should* appeal to those poor, sad, explosive Balkans so much as Roseborough's peacefulness? They must grow very tired of the continuous gun-popping and broken glass, and long for the 'twelve hours of dreamless sleep' to which Professor Lee alludes in the article. I always think that the sound of windows, or even glass tumblers, breaking is such a sharp, perturbing noise. I particularly dislike it. And then, too, the pieces of broken glass, flying through the air or scattered in profusion about the roads, are really dangerous."

She was adjusting her glasses, so did not see the sparkles of merriment in Rosamond's eyes.

"The article is short—only a few hundred words—let me read it to you. It is entitled" (she paused—dwelling lovingly on the written word before she uttered it) "'Roseborough.' Listen." She repeated "Roseborough."

"Here, where all hearts are tender and sincere, and no harsh word is ever breathed aloud, I will spend my days—be they few or many. Roseborough, thou art the other name of Happiness! Thy fragrance is a spiritual sweet that exudes from fadeless petals. Thy calm days are the flower, and thy velvety, star-veined nights of twelve hours of dreamless sleep are the leafy stem, of my perfect Rose of Content. I am happy indeed to be a busy bee plying my simple art at the centre of this sweetness. For what is my art—and all art? What is the art of pen, brush, chisel, and melodic strain? These are but parts

of the great Art of Life, namely the distillation of love. If Happiness be thy other earthly name, dear Roseborough, thy 'new name'—written in the heavens—is Love. To every seeker of harmony, thou art his end of journeying; to every wanderer, his home.

(Signed) PH. AUTOCRITUS LEE,
21st June, 1895.

"He did not even initial all that he wrote; but he must have felt himself that this was especially fine—of course, as a professor of literature, with degrees, he would know that about his own work as well as about another's—for he signed it in full and dated it. Except the first name," she added. "He never signed Phineas but always used Ph. instead, saying that Ph. was short for philosophy and so was he, *short* of it, in spite of all his profound cogitations."

She sat gazing at the faded handwriting, though the tears, that slowly formed and coursed her finely wrinkled cheeks, entirely blurred the lines for her.

"'Here where all hearts are tender and sincere.' To think that he wrote that about Roseborough nearly twenty years ago, my dear! And it was just as true then as it is now."

Rosamond put both her arms about the older woman's neck and leaned her cheek against hers.

"His faith saw the beautiful truth of things, nothing else. It was the same quality he loved best in Jack. He used to say that Jack's faith was like the

morning lark. Nothing could keep it from soaring and singing."

"Then he is the right person to edit those papers and you have reason to be happy."

Mrs. Lee looked down into Rosamond's eyes with unwonted solemnity.

"Mrs. Mearely, I am going to tell you something now which, in days to come, you will hear from many others. Then you will remember that it was I who first told it to you—here, in this little room. Professor Lee was one of the world's great and original minds, though the world has not yet found it out."

"Dear Mrs. Lee, I am sure he was."

"While Jack, of course, agrees with me about that, he feels that Professor Lee's highest value was of another quality. He writes somewhere in this letter—wait; yes, it is in this one—mum-m-m." She buzzed softly over the lines, hunting for the passage. "Ah! here it is:

> "I think that to lay stress, in a preface, upon the vastness and originality of Professor Lee's intellect would be a mistake. Besides, in these careless days, the words have been misapplied until their meaning is nil."

She looked up from the letter. "He means by that, dear, that while the words are *truly* applicable to Professor Lee they would fail to make him so conceived of by the reader; because they have been

used noisily by persons of no judgment to describe men of shallow attainments—like some of those unfortunate foreign professors, for instance, who are so pathetically askew about everything. Poor things. It was the electron that set them all off. My dear husband used to say that the atomic theory, though purely materialistic and proving nothing in the world, was nevertheless not inimical to scientists' sobriety and dignity, but that, when they lost the atom, they lost their heads and their shoes and their shirts as well! The electronic theory proved too exciting for them. He would say to me: 'My dear, they should have held on to the atom. It was much the safer toy!' When I saw the other day that radium has shown that matter disappears altogether, I wondered what the poor things would do now. They must be dreadfully disturbed." She paused, shaking her head from side to side in sympathy.

"What else does Mr. Falcon say about Professor Lee?" Rosamond called her back, tactfully, to the main point.

"Ah! none knows better than Jack that Professor Lee was secretly a very great man. He goes on to say:

"He thought and said the things which all good and loving men have thought and said, and in much the same way. Because like them, he had discovered the truth of those things through living it. That was what made him

priceless to us. He was a Sympathy—a refining and strengthening animus—which endured and went with us to meet life. The world of letters, science, and philosophy will hardly note these memoirs, perhaps; but if the day ever comes when greatness is measured by goodness—as *he* measured it—and hope, faith, and charity form the lens of the scientist's microscope, then his name, like Abou ben Adhem's, will lead all the rest!"

"You can see by that last phrase that Jack considers Professor Lee to have been far in advance of his time as a thinker."

Rosamond did not speak at once. When she did, she said:

"Yes, one can see plainly what he thinks, and also what he *feels*—which is more important. I think he is a very nice man, your Mr. Falcon; and this afternoon I will bake him a *marvellous* cake. He deserves it."

Mention of food brought Mrs. Lee back to the immediate present and its problems.

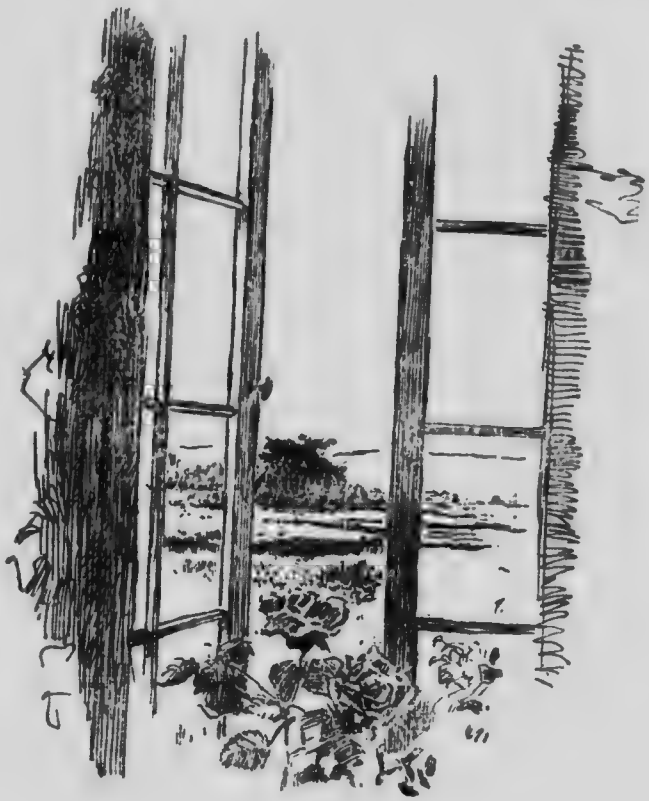
"Oh, my dear, how good of you! I shall send for Bella Greenup to cook other things. But there is something even more important than food." She paused and patted her lips with her forefinger, evidently cogitating deeply.

"What?"

"Roseborough—dear, sensitive Roseborough. How shall I present my Jack to Roseborough so that

everyone will feel his homecoming—and the book, and all of it—to be a communal event and not merely a selfish, personal pleasure of mine? *That* will require some planning. Yes, it will need some quite subtle planning."

She folded her hands on the pile of notebooks. Her absent gaze turned to the window where the splashes of purple and pink morning-glories vignetted a bit of sun-smitten river. She was thinking hard.



CHAPTER VI

ROSAMOND regarded her with eyes a-twinkle and presently interrupted her meditation to ask:

"What did Roseborough think of him before he went away?"

Mrs. Lee sighed.

"That is what adds to the difficulty. The truth is that Roseborough hardly knew him. Jack did not care for Roseborough! It seems incredible, but it is a fact. Jack did not care for Roseborough—I mean, the people. He was an orphan and a poor lad of whose beginnings we knew little. He came to us because, in his wanderings, he had met a Charleroy man and heard from him of my husband. He had been tramping about the farming country, year after year, tilling, sowing, reaping—whatever outdoor work he could get—and saving his pennies to put toward an education when he should find just the right instructor. As a child he had been with gypsies."

"Gypsies! What adventures!"

"Yes, his mother, a young girl of excellent birth, had run away and married a poor artist and been cast off by her proud family. They suffered the hardship

of poverty, and Jack was soon left an orphan. Whether he joined the gypsies or they stole him I don't remember, but he was with them for awhile. At one time his mother's relations found him and offered to bring him up, but he considered the restrictions of their home too irksome. After two years of it, he ran off and wandered about, earning his way, as I have told you. I shall never forget the night he came to us—it was a rainy, autumn evening—a black, splashing night. There was a loud knock on the door and, when we opened it—for I had followed the Professor, holding the candle (we did not have electric lights in our day in Villa Rose)—there stood a dark, tall, sturdy-looking young man, with long, black hair and the largest and blackest eyes I'd ever seen; and, what's more, he stood there on two bare feet, and he had no coat, only a gray woollen shirt, belted into dark, fustian trousers turned up above his ankles."

"You were frightened, weren't you?"

"Hardly that; I was more amazed. He said—and his voice was mellow and attractive—'You are Professor Lee and I have come to you to be taught.' My husband asked, 'What do you wish to be taught?' And Jack said, 'I can read and write and keep a merry heart under all skies; but I wish you to teach me whatever men must know to make them good and wise.' Then my husband said, 'Come in, and

I will give you dry clothes and something hot to drink.' Jack answered, 'Oh, as to that, the weather and I are friends. It never hurts me.' Well, my dear, he came in and we attended to his needs and gave him a room for the night. Of course he was not ready then to enter college, so my husband gave him private instruction. And he seemed to take it for granted that he could live in our home so we let him have the little room off the living-room . . ."

"The little room? Which do you mean?"

"Oh, that is all changed now, of course. Mr. Mearely—when he bought Villa Rose—had it enlarged and built out, taking in all that bend of the verandah. It is your music room now. Jack was a good deal of trouble, you may know!" She laughed. "But he loved my husband and was constantly showing his gratitude, so that I never minded when he upset things."

"And he didn't like Roseborough? You could forgive such sacrilege?"

"One forgave Jack everything. He made very few intimates. Indeed, I doubt if he had any besides ourselves. He loved Nature, books, and solitude. He was elusive and shy, I think. For instance I remember that one day while we three were chatting over a cup of chocolate we saw dear Mrs. Witherby and her aged uncle—the late Reverend Dr. Cumming-Shaw of Trenton Waters—drive up to the

door. As I turned back from greeting them, I saw one leg of Jack's fustian trousers and a bare foot disappearing over the back fence. The worst of it was, he had taken the cake with him and I had nothing but crackers to offer the poor dear old vicar, who died almost immediately after of bronchitis. It was really whooping-cough."

"Wicked, careless lady! They weren't crackers. You gave him dog-biscuit by mistake and he barked himself to death."

Mrs. Lee shook a stern forefinger at her irreverent guest.

"You say shocking things. What I mean to show by my little anecdote is that Jack . . . well . . . that was, in general, Jack's attitude toward Roseborough."

Rosamond burst out laughing.

"His attitude? A barefoot kick over the back fence? Oh, Mrs. Lee!"

"How very naughty you are this morning! To twist my words so! I shall always maintain that it was shyness which made Jack avoid all intimacy with those who would have received him for my husband's sake. They did know, later, that he had left the college abruptly, just because the desire to wander was so strong in him; and that, too, after Professor Lee had succeeded in having him appointed to teach minor subjects. They were

most indignant—even those who did not know him at all."

"They might have left it to Professor Lee and to you to be indignant."

"Oh! but you see, in a matter of that kind the communal spirit of Roseborough was affronted. And, alas, it will be remembered. All that must be overcome, and Roseborough must take him to its heart. How shall it be managed?"

To manage the communal spirit of sensitive Roseborough was no light undertaking. Old head and young head pondered in silence.

"If they could come together in some wholly unexpected way, without personalities, and not as Roseborough and Jack Falcon, who shook the dust of Roseborough from his feet sixteen years ago! If only they could meet under other identities and, having no memories, each immediately find the other's true self!"

"Like a fairy prince and a fairy kingdom. Oh, yes, that would be lovely. But," the gay, mocking light danced within her eyes again, "even if life *is* 'beautifully arranged,' it is not *so* beautifully arranged as all that!"

"What would *you* suggest?"

"Well, I think that—since he *can't* come as a fairy prince and discover Roseborough's true nature and, in turn, be discovered as a human symbol of all

Roseborough's day-dreams—which is what you would like, you writer of fairy tales"—(she paused, with wrinkled brow and pursed lips) "I think you will have to make it the very opposite of all that, and lay stress on the fact that this returning wanderer *is* the very same Jack Falcon who *did* run away, but who has now come back to dear old Roseborough with bells on, and all of them ringing! And then Roseborough will be beside itself with delight at the opportunity of welcoming home its distinguished prodigal son. Emphasize the point that he has deserted kings' palaces for Roseborough and they will all turn out to greet him."

"Yes! Yes! You're right. Roseborough *would* enjoy that view."

"How will he come?"

"By the morning train to Trenton Waters. I know he will want to walk home from there—the old walk he loved—down the river path. He should arrive between ten and eleven, easily. What do you think of this? To gather all our dear friends here to meet him, at a sort of informal breakfast?"

Rosamond clapped her hands.

"Oh, yes! I knew you'd think of something clever in a moment! Make it one of those breakfast-lunch affairs with delicious cold things to eat, and have it set out in the garden in a semicircle about the well, so that the big tree will shade them all. Mrs.

Greenup can do all the cooking for it this afternoon. I will run home and telephone her that you want her. And do let me bring over enough of that old Mearely damask to cover the tables."

"Yes—yes. I shall be so grateful for everything. Oh, dear! I *never* was in such a flutter! I do believe that I never, *never* was in such a flutter! How shall I let them all know?"

"I will telephone to all those who have telephones. And—oh! a splendid idea! We will ask Mrs. Witherby to drive about to those who have no telephones, and ask them to come. Then she will feel that it is really *she* who is arranging everything, and that will help tremendously."

"Yes, yes—dear Mrs. Witherby. In a sense, her nature epitomizes our sensitive little town. One must not take it by surprise—that is, not deliberately. How fortunate that dear Jack has given me at least a day's leeway! If he had walked in on me to-morrow, without notice, I doubt whether I could ever have truly convinced them that I had not known of his coming and kept the secret from them perhaps for weeks. Quite innocently I might have caused discord in [illegible]borough!"

"I think it would [illegible]ice for you to come to Villa Rose this evening for an hour. Now, don't shake your head, I know you go to bed when the first star peeps out. Some of us will bring you home at eight,

if you like. This is my idea, and it is a very good one. I will ask Mrs. Witherby to come over with Corinne and Mabel for a round or two of cards with Dr. and Mrs. Wells—and Judge Giffen and Mr. Andrews. Wilton will come, too, Just those few—oh, yes, and Dr. Frei also; he can play for us. I can say that I wanted a few friends about me this evening, since my sister has disappointed me. That will seem very natural to them. And you can take the occasion, just at the right moment, to talk about Mr. Falcon and to tell about the book and the royal person—all in that unselfish, tactful way of yours. They will all be pleased, and Mrs. Witherby will set the pace for Roseborough. Nobody dares gainsay her."

"How thoughtful you are! My dear, you have forgotten nothing. It is really you who will have made my Jack's homecoming a success. And *you* have just called *me* unselfish! The word belongs to *you*, dear."

"No, I'm not. I'm not! I'm—I'm jealous." Suddenly her eyes misted and her lip quivered. Protest, passionate and clamorous, surged through her and out at her trembling mouth. "Oh! must *I* wait till I am seventy to have a real, Wonderful Day? Nothing—nothing but make-believe."

"My dear child, what is the matter?"

Rosamond's fingers tightened on the hand which

had gently taken hers. She turned almost fiercely upon Mrs. Lee as if she challenged fate, or an enemy, in this benign old lady who was regarding her now with some perturbation.

"Will nobody ever come to *me* till I'm old—*old—old?*"

"Will nobody ever come to you?" Mrs. Lee repeated, puzzling.

Tragedy rushed on, interrupting her.

"This is my Wonderful Day—my only, one, Wonderful Day. And somebody should come—*he* should come . . ."

"He? Oh, you mean Jack."

"I *don't!* I dare say he's nice—a thoroughly good man. I'm glad that you're glad, and all that. But *I'm* not glad! No, I'm not! I think it's an outrage. The gray, the bald, the whiskered! Roseborough is full of *them* already. Another of those is an outrage!"

"My—dear—child! *What* is an outrage?"

"That another oldish man is coming to Roseborough! I want a fairy prince—or a beggar—or a tramp—if only he is *young!* He can come to the back door in bare feet and fustian, or in rags and patches. I shan't mind what he wears or how empty his pockets are, if only he is young—young—and can laugh out loud and say 'Good-morning, Rosamond!'"

"My—dear! You go so fast; and tears and laugh-

ter follow each other so rapidly that I am all in a whirl. But if you think my Jack . . ."

Rosamond broke in impetuously:

"Do you hear that? Ding—dong, ding—dong. It is eleven o'clock and nearly half my only Wonderful Day has passed already! I shall run away now and do all that I have promised—telephones, cakes, linen, Witherby, everything! But every moment of the time I shall be saying in my heart: 'It is an outrage that another gray, bald, whiskered, middle-aged, prosy *old* man is coming to Roseborough! It is an outrage!' . . . *Why couldn't he be young?*"

Before Mrs. Lee could gather herself into composure after a sudden violent hug and as sudden and violent a release, her mercurial friend was dashing through the gateway into the grounds of Villa Rose.

Mrs. Lee sat down and gave herself up to reflection.

"'A gray—bald—whiskered—outrage!' Is that what she said? Dear, dear. What *can* have given her the notion that Jack . . . ?" She murmured. "To be sure I *did* say that some of our boys are past middle life now, but I'm sure I didn't say that Jack . . ." [She broke off her musing to pat her sooty kitten smartly. "No, no! naughty kitty! You are not to scratch the table legs!"] "Such a rebel cry for youth! Nay, it was more; it was an unashamed cry for a young man! Yet we all thought hers such a wonderful marriage for a

farm girl. But perhaps it wasn't, after all. Do those who live by the soil need the cling of the earth in all vital things? Why there! what a mate she might have made for my Jack if . . . ."

Her perplexed expression changed suddenly into a glow and a smile as if her questioning thoughts had accidentally discovered something so unexpected that she hardly knew what to make of it.

"If? Why, there *is* no 'if'! She is quite free! It may be difficult for Roseborough to believe that its Hibbert Mearely has really passed away from it to a better place—for, of course, it seems almost disloyal to suggest that even heaven is a better place than Roseborough—but the truth remains that Hibbert Mearely *has gone*." After contemplating this calamitous but none-the-less statistical fact, she added, "And it would almost seem as if that April-hearted child he married realizes it and is"—she cast about for a word and presently decided upon —"resigned."

CHAPTER VII

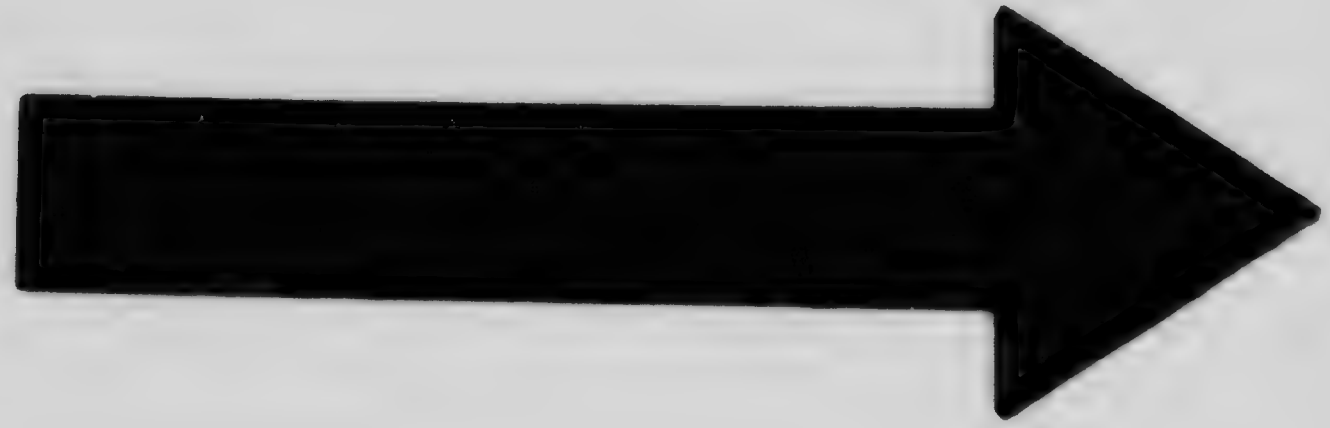
DING-DONG.

The last stroke of eleven drummed softly through the thick leafage of the orchard. Rosamond sped down the path, as sure-footed as if she wore no other heels, or soles either, than the ones she had come into the world with, and by which Mother Earth had held little Rosamond Cort of the Poplars Vale farm in close acquaintance until the fancy butter-pats had reduced poverty and inspired ambition.

She executed faithfully the commissions she had given herself. After having entranced "Dollop's Drugs" via telephone, by sending him to inform Bella Greenup—the lady of his heart—that her culinary art was in requisition, she called for the number of that important gentlewoman, whose nature—as Mrs. Lee had said—epitomized Roseborough.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Witherby."

"Who is it? Oh, of course; it is Mrs. Mearely." The answer came back in rather high accents and the over-emphasized impressiveness that commonly garnishes the slim utterances of self-importance. "I was saying to Corinne not five minutes ago—



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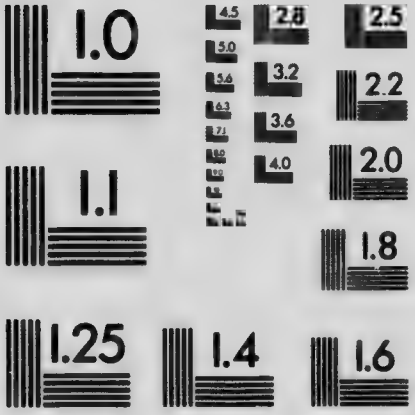

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actually, my dear Mrs. Mearely, not five minutes ago, or *ten* at the *most*—'I think I shall drive round to Mrs. Mearely's this afternoon.' Yes! that is exactly what I said to Corinne *not five moments ago.*"

"How—er—remarkable! Then it is fortunate I rang up; because I shall be out all afternoon and would be so disappointed if I returned to find that I had missed you."

"Indeed? Where are you going?"

"Ah! you may well ask what I am going to do."

"What? What? A secret? (Be quiet, Central, I'm talking.)"

"A beautiful secret, but I'm going to tell *you* about it now. It is Mrs. Lee's secret and she has asked me to let *you* know of it first. If she had a telephone she would be telling you about it now herself. However, she said that she felt sure you would allow me to be her messenger."

"Oh, my *dear* Mrs. Mearely!"

"One of Professor Lee's old pupils—oh, of years ago—is coming back to Roseborough to-morrow morning. Yes. Oh, very unexpected. A tremendous surprise! And Mrs. Lee is inviting you and Roseborough to breakfast at eleven to-morrow in her garden to help her welcome the prodigal home."

"Oh! How exciting! But who *is* he?"

"His name is Falcon—Jack Falcon."

"Oh! no one *I* ever knew, evidently. Jack Falcon?"

"Yes, Falcon is the name—one of them; the other, of course, being Jack."

"Falcon?—Jack? Stop!" (dramatically—as if Mrs. Mearely were running from the instrument at the other end.) "Isn't that the man who literally decamped from Roseborough years ago?"

["Waiting?" Maria Potts, the Central, always intoned her official query at brief intervals through Mrs. Witherby's telephonic monologues and delighted to cut her off, which she always did, as soon as the conversation ceased to interest Miss Potts herself.]

"Yes—er—that is—I understand he *did* leave Roseborough some years ago," Rosamond answered.

"Falcon? Yes. I'm sure that is the name. We never encouraged the Lees to talk about him after he went away, though they, no doubt, would have liked to make us believe he was doing well. They were idiotic about him when he *was* here. (Be quiet, Central!) How extraordinary of Mrs. Lee to be giving a breakfast to *that* person! While he lived in Roseborough, he *ignored* Roseborough; and he ran away from it *just as soon as ever he could.*"

Rosamond saw—or heard, rather—that hers was not to be so easy a task. She summoned all her diplomacy and continued:

"It is because of all this that Mrs. Lee is calling on you to help her. She feels—er—dependent on your generous heart to mellow the heart of Roseborough. It seems that Mr. Falcon has come to a realization of what Roseborough and—er—incidentally, Professor and Mrs. Lee—did for him."

"Well! I should *hope* so," Mrs. Witherby broke in—it was always difficult for her to remain silent and allow another to talk—"but I certainly doubt it. Why, I've seen him climb a *thorn hedge* to avoid meeting me on the highway. I have always made it a point to stop the boys, especially when I saw them dawdling about the countryside, and say a few pointed words to them about wasted opportunities. (*Be quiet, Central!*) But I don't believe I ever once caught *that* uncouth, hedge-leaping youth. I can't imagine *him* coming to any good."

"Life—the years—age, you know—have greatly changed him. He has come to feel that, but for his training here in Roseborough, he could never have made his" (she elongated the next two words) "great success."

"What's that? What's that you say?" Mrs. Witherby shook the instrument in her excitement. "Success? *What* success?"

("Waiting?")

("Be quiet, Central! Be quiet, I say!) What success?"

"You are to hear all about *that* this evening. I told Mrs. Lee I should ask you and the girls and the Wellses, the Judge, Mr. Andrews, and Dr. Frei—and Wilton, of course—to come in for cards and a little supper. My sister has disappointed me. So I shall be all alone, unless you come. I shall coax Mrs. Lee to come, too, for an hour—though she never goes anywhere in the evening. Then—with that inimitable tact and sympathy of yours—you can lead her to tell us all about Mr. Falcon's achievements in Europe."

"In *Europe?* Good gracious!"

"Yes. Of course, I only gathered odds and ends about it, because Mrs. Lee is so retiring and seemed to feel that to tell of the old pupil's honours might appear vain on her part . . ."

"Oh, *dear* Mrs. Lee! Why *should* she feel so? If this Mr. Falcon has won honours abroad, Mrs. Lee can hardly consider his return in a *personal* light. *I* consider it entirely a *Roseborough* matter."

"There! Do you know I felt that you would? I told Mrs. Lee so. Isn't that remarkable?"

"Did you? *Did* you? My *dear* Mrs. Mearely! But don't you yourself consider that it is a Roseborough matter?"

"I do. Yes—I do." Her tone was judicial. "However, I won't say anything more to Mrs. Lee about that. I will trust it all to your tact and

sympathy, when you see her this evening, here. Won't that be best?" Sweetly.

"Oh, entirely! Oh, yes! Oh, certainly! Leave it *absolutely* in *my* hands. Dear Mrs. Lee! I always know exactly how to manage her. In fact, my dear Mrs. Mearely, I sometimes say that that is my one great gift; (*Will* you be quiet, Central?)—er—my one great gift is managing people, *especially* in emergencies."

"All Roseborough admits that, Mrs. Witherby. It is a wonderful gift; but not your only one, I'm sure. So we can rely on you this afternoon to carry the breakfast invitation to those of our dear friends who have no telephones? That means, chiefly, the Gleasons, the Montereys, and the Pelham-Hews."

"And the MacMillans, and the Grahams."

"Yes, and the Wattses. If *only* they all had telephones, I could spare you the trouble. Really they *ought* to have them put in, for their friends' sakes."

"Ah! now, *there* I *don't* agree with you! No, I really do *not agree*. The telephone is a little luxury, like electric lights—and—er—modern plumbing—to which those are entitled who can afford them, and whose heads will not be turned by possessing them. Like ourselves, dear Mrs. Mearely. But what is permissible luxury in one home is wicked extravagance in another. (Maria Potts! If you say 'Waiting' to me again while I am talking, I

shall report you!) If persons in the MacMillans' straitened circumstances were to have a telephone put in, I think all Roseborough would resent it. I am convinced that *I* should! And when one knows —as we all do—that the Gleasons can hardly manage to keep their boy at Charleroy College! As for the Pelham-Hews, with their small income and those seven simpering girls on their hands! Well, I, for one, *dare* not imagine what all Roseborough would say if we heard, to-morrow, that they were piping water to the second floor—and wallowing in enamelled tubs! No, my dear Mrs. Mearely. In the Witherby home a stationary bath-tub is a refinement; in the Pelham-Hew home it would be an immorality."

It was at this point that Miss Potts deliberately disconnected "Roseborough one-eight" from "Roseborough two-one" and turned deaf ears to the latter's indignant demand for "the manager at Trenton."

Rosamond came to the door sill of the living-room again and drew a deep breath of the breeze-stirred fragrance which enveloped Villa Rose on this perfect midsummer morning. She sighed.

"Oh, Roseborough, couldn't you make a milady of the little butter girl from Poplars without making her—Milady Prevaricator? What is it—you, there, Mr. Golden Sun, who sees everything; you, shining old heart-searcher, tell me—what is it makes so many poor humans twist and trick when it is their

blessed privilege to speak the plain truth? Did you laugh long ago, Mr. Sun, when you saw the little, barefoot butter girl birched for telling fibs?—and did you know that some day she would put on silk stockings and satin shoes and have to learn to use something called 'tact'—first, because the rod of a certain fine gentleman's sarcasm was merciless toward any feeling that frankly revealed itself, and secondly, because—marvel of marvels!—most people, it seems, prefer deceit? Heigh-ho! How the old pool in the south meadow is shining among its reeds at this very moment!"

She laughed, and the wistful shadow which had darkened her eyes disappeared.

"At any rate, I've managed Mrs. Witherby so that dear Mrs. Lee can continue to believe in the beneficent spirit of Roseborough. Roseborough will open its arms to her Jack Falcon instead of tearing off his hair—that is, if he still *has* hair. B'r'r'r, but I am a-weary of old men!"

She gathered up her breakfast dishes, and took them into the kitchen. The kitchen closet yielded a blue-checked all-over apron of Amanda's. Rosamond literally dropped herself into it at the neck. She pinned it up in front so that she could not fall over it. The back she did not bother about but let it trail. After washing the dishes, she set about the cake-making. This was not so simple as she had

expected. It appeared presently that, in a few years of miladying, one could forget even such native feminine knowledge as pints, pecks, and egg calculations.

"This is absurd!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "I can't have forgotten! Why, I made much better cakes than Mrs. Greenup does. I shall have to find a cook book."

A thorough search of every shelf and drawer in Amanda's domain yielded naught in literature but a few almanacs, and a tract entitled "Howl, Sodom!" This last, she knew, belonged to Jemima, who had surreptitiously attended a revival in Trenton Waters during the spring and had been roundly scolded for it by her elder sister, for whom the Church of her fathers was sufficient. Mrs. Mearely surmised that Jemima had hidden this leaflet of grace in the clove pot because no cranny of her bedroom was safe from Amanda's prying.

"Horrid nonsense!" She dropped it into the stove. "There! I'm not going to have that Howl Jemima stuff in *my* kitchen. No cook book? Of course, not! His Friggets' boast that they never even measure anything, because they are such born cooks! What shall I do?"

She spent five minutes in dark despair. Then a light broke upon her. It was a light with humour in its flash, evidently, for she giggled.

"Now, I wonder if there is a cake recipe in the old cook book written by that Portuguese woman, Countess Lallia of Mountjoye, who catered to the Prince of Paradis so attractively that she never lost his affection?"

She was soon rummaging recklessly among the old volumes on the lowest shelf of the glassed bookcase. Each book or collection of leaves was in a leather binding and bore a tag, telling its name, date, and presumed history in Mr. Hibbert Mearely's fine flourish. Memoirs, missals and Latin parchments of all sorts and sizes—some said to have been in popes' and princes' pockets—were tumbled out on the floor, while irreverent Mrs. Mearely hunted for information on practical cakemaking to serve Mr. Falcon's palate.

"Ah ha!" she cried, gleefully. "Here it is!" She scrutinized the tag attached to some sheets of parchment in a green leather binding (stamped with the Mearely crest). The parchment bore characters in black India ink and each page was ornamented by a coloured margin of very badly painted fishes, birds, bunches of fruit, and other delicacies. There was even one little creature on a platter which may have represented a stuffed suckling pig, or a mulatto baby *au jus*, with its mouth pouting with prunes. The countess, by her own confession, had wantonly tossed toxic and gaseous

p. . . together and then dared indigestion to murder love. Most of her gluttonous recipes bore this introductory note:—

> And upon thys day, beinge of ambitious mynde to pleasure the gracious appetyte of milorde, the Prince of Paradis withe delicate dyshes of newe raptures, I didde herewythe devyse and prepare and with myne owne handes styrre the essences thereof, thys—"puddynge," "sauce," "souppe," or whatever it might be.

So well had his fair one pleasured, devysed, and styrred to feed Dom Paradis's earthly appetite that it was easy to believe the last legend of their love; namely, that, in dying, he had left her his jewelled belt—no doubt as a grateful remembrance from the princely "tummy" it had adorned though not restrained, and which she had kept so well lined.

"Countessa, if love and greed kept pace in your little affair, your hearts must have been overflowing with sweet spices and *goo;* for you smothered your food in them. I think a plain, boiled potato would have been a chastening experience for you both."

Rosamond was sitting on the floor, tailor fashion, in the centre of a scattered ring of tagged leather cases and books of all sizes, with the countess's illuminated parchments spread on her knees. She turned several pages of death-defying sauces, before she came upon the welcome phrase "I didde devyse a

cake"—or "a goodlie heartes cake"—as Contessa Lallia y Poptu de Sillihofo Sanza Mountjoye preferred to describe it.

Wrote the Countess:

On thys day, beinge the same of a most warme mydsummere day, I dydde persuade milorde husbande to waite upon his highness and so to goe forthe and dydde sende unto milorde the Prince of Paradis, who is in alle weatheres mye beloved kinsmanne and friende in exile, to come unto me to taste of a cake . . .

"Oh, you wasteful woman, to use all those eggs!" exclaimed Rosamond, in reading the list of ingredients. "You must have passed over the first-born of the hen houses of Mountjoye like the destroying angel over the Egyptians. A piece of butter as big as milord's fist, she says; that is, half to three quarters of a pound. Figs, raisins—so 'thatte they dydde cover mye two handes.' That's the way Amanda measures—by hand. All born cooks do. Contessa, I believe this is the original Lady Baltimore cake—except that it is ever so much richer, and peppered with spice and ground perfumes, which I shall omit with the 'oil of beaten milk,' which is merely melted butter. No wonder he died, your Dom Paradis. You oiled his goings for him, and slid him down where all breakers of the commandments go. You were not only a Portuguese, you were a Portu-grease."

She read on and presently repeated the lines aloud with little murmurs of laughter.

Thys cake dydde so pleasure mye deare Dom Paradis thatte he therewythe expressed a greate love for mye person; whych he dydde declare to be beauteouse beyonde compare, and manny tymes dydde kysse me. and wysh milorde the Earl myght nevere return, and dydde suddenlye falle into a greate jealousie, and beseech me to vowe thatte I would no cakes make for Mountjoye, and dydde aske and importune me to saye if he be stille so younge and handsome thatte I do love him, I beinge twentie yeares youngere than milorde Dom Paradis. Then sayde I thatte I would bathe and dresse mye hearte for hys delights, but at this he cryde oute and would not and—when he had eaten alle my love-cake—Mountjoye dydde enter.

"Twenty years younger! and was Mountjoye old, too? Poor Contessa! You and I both, it seems, must cater—and caker—for old men. Oh, Mr. Falcon, when you bite into my modified edition of the Contessa's 'love-cake,' I pray you, fall not in love with me!"

When she had popped her cake into the oven, tossed off Amanda's apron, and stepped outside to cool her cheeks in the breeze, the sun stood directly over the rose garden and twelve o'clock was ringing from the tower by the river.

"Noon! half my Wonderful Day has gone, and I

haven't even set out on the adventures I planned at nine." She thought this over for a few moments, and concluded that, so far as this morning was concerned, it had been a question of choice between her own day and Mrs. Lee's, and that Mrs. Lee's had won because it was actual—one of age's realities—and her own was only a dream. Then, reversing all this wisdom, she added hopefully, "But I still have this afternoon!"

She walked across the garden and leaned her elbows on the rough stone wall that formed Villa Rose's front defense. Portulacca and canary creeper ran over the stone displaying their bright green foliage and little blossoms attractively against the granite gray. Farther along, the wall rose to a man's height and ragged robins and rose ramblers wantoned over it merrily, always a-hum and a-twitter with bees and wrens.

"That looks like Mr. Andrews," she thought, surveying a small cart, drawn by a fat, stocky, black pony wending upward. The road was steep and one could not keep travellers in sight for long at a time. She decided to wait until he drew near, in order to give him his invitation for the evening card game.

Forgetting her lilac-bud silk and her Irish lace petticoat; forgetting the blush from the cook stove, which still mantled her modest brow, forgetting that

the strains of the gay minuet issuing from her lips, with the words of salutation to herself, were being carried to the ears of the gentleman in the cart; all innocently, she waited.

It was important that he should not pass without seeing her, since he could save her the trouble and delay of telephoning to several of the desired breakfast guests whom he would see on the round of his duties. Mr. Andrews was the treasurer of the Widowers' Mite Society of St. Jephtha's, which paid the sexton's salary, and this was his day for collecting from his associates. Mrs. Mearely, preferring to arrest attention by a gesture rather than by a shout, plucked a rose-bud from the bush nearest her, and threw it; well aimed, it struck the brim of the gentleman's straw hat and dropped into the cart in front of him. He looked up, startled, and heard a glad young voice chanting:

"Oh, Mr. Andrews! I am waiting for you."

CHAPTER VIII

MR. ALBERT ANDREWS was a young man, according to Roseborough time, being now in his forty-second year; and he was a widower. Although he was not rich he was fairly "comfortable." He was not brilliant, but his character was exemplary. If he was somewhat deliberate—one need not say pompous—of utterance, this was altogether becoming in a gentleman who had twice been elected tax collector, and, once, president of the Orphans' Fund Board. He was not handsome, but Roseborough ladies considered him "personable"—just as they had considered Hibbert Mearely *distingué* and as they did consider Judge Giffen imposing, Wilton Howard magnetic, and Dr. Frei "so foreign and so elegant." In height, width, weight, colouring, and expression, he was medium; on the top of his head he was less than that, because his hair there was thin, but he devoted careful attention to it and, as yet, the shining, pinky surface, lurking amid the tan-coloured strands, was screened. His eyes were prominently set, pale and placid. He had been "alone" for six years; but, during the last two, he had been slowly coming to a momentous decision.

In fact, he had already arrived at it. He had decided to propose to Hibbert Mearely's widow.

With this canny and romantic aim in view, he had recently visited a millinery and tub frocks shop in Trenton, kept by a woman who owed his mother for favours bestowed on her in poorer days, and had allowed her to settle the score, so to speak, by informing him as to the etiquette involved.

"It's all but four years sence the departed did so," Mrs. Bunny had said, after ponderous consideration, "and you say her perferred raiment seems to be of a palish hue with black ribbons? That's lavender, an' no question 'tall about it. I'd say, Mr. Albert, after a'most a lifetime of expeer'ence in dressin' the genteel sets, that—so long as the black ribbons indures—silence must be your potion. (It is conceivable that she meant "portion.") Even if she was to put on white or lavender streamers, you couldn't pop the question, but only *hint*, an' trim your subtile speech with looks an' gestures. If she was to step out afore you in colours, it would be good ettikay to fall on your knees an' offer your name an' pertection. (Of course," she amended parenthetically, "your name ain't nothing to the Mearely name; an' I don't know how much pertection you'd be ekal to in a pinch—you never havin' played no basketball, nor nothing but whist—but there's no requiremints to tell *her* so.) So long as she's got a speck of

mournin' onto her, do it rev'rence an' utter no ardint word. Bestow on her sighs an' looks of yearnin'; an' you can converse, offhand, concernin' wedded love an' flowers that never fadeth, an' the moon, an' all such sent'mints—an'"—she wound up, impressively—"*hover*, Mr. Albert, *hover*."

This last bit of advice he had obeyed as consistently as was possible to a man by nature meek and unobtrusive—he had hovered. He had, also, in a measure, overcome his temperamental reserve through the private practice of amorous facial expression in the mirror after shaving.

Mr. Albert Andrews, like the majority of his sex, was practically colour-blind. He knew black and white, red, yellow, blue, and green in their violent tints. A cobalt blue, for instance, a mustard yellow or a bright bottle-green, he could immediately identify. Other shades, such as tan, champagne, lilac-bud, lavender, mauve, cadet and alice blues, pale pinks, straw-yellows, and delicate grass-stain and reseda greens, he called gray. He knew gray also to be a colour; because he himself—as well as other Roseborough gentlemen of quality, who were nicely apparelled—favoured it in summer.

"Gray," he had answered unhesitatingly in response to Mrs. Bunny's question as to what Mrs. Mearely was wearing; "Gray with a dark pattern in it, and black ribbons."

Her expert knowledge immediately translated this correctly. "Not gray, Mr. Albert; *lavender*."

"Ah!" with heavy facetiousness, "when *ladies* wear it they call it lavender? The sentimental dears! So that is lavender. Well. Well."

Mrs. Bunny had thereupon led him to the ribbon counter and endeavoured to teach him to distinguish between pastels.

"For," said she, "Mrs. Mearely, being that kind of a brownish blonde, an' not pure goldin nor yet flaxin, she'll not take to loud shades. An', Mr. Albert, if you don't know a pale turkoy blue, nor a silver green nor a fawn, from a lavender, how'll you know if the time's come to cease your dumb yearnin' and bust out?"

Earnestly seeking to profit by Mrs. Bunny's instructions, he had carefully scanned, several times daily, the little ribbon and chiffon samples she had snipped from the reels and labelled for him. Even without them in his hand, he believed he should feel a degree of confidence if he were to encounter his charmer without her black streamers and decked in a "pastel."

He looked up now and saw her—a sight for rapture, even to the eyes of an unimaginative widower of forty-two, and indeterminate as to colours. He saw that the customary dark garniture was not there. He saw the white lace bodice and sleeves, the

blushing, radiant face, the rosy lips, humming softly and mellifluously. He saw the silk folds of shoulder-drape and girdle, where the sun cast a silvery sheen over the material's hue.

What *was* that hue? Poor man, his heart leaped and fell before the dooming fact that his mind—forgetful of its recent culture in this subject—had automatically registered the word, "gray." To find his intellect immediately correcting its stumbling with "lavender" was no consolation. Here, seemingly, was his great opportunity; it was calling to him, throwing coquettish flowerets, and chanting: "I am waiting for you"—yet, alas, he knew not whether the tint of that sun-silvered, silken girdle enjoined upon him a silence to "do it rev'rence" or coyly urged him to "bust out."

Drops of moisture stood upon his brow, his hands became clammy, as he drew the pony up to the wall of Villa Rose garden. Mutely he invoked the spirit of Mrs. Bunny.

"Mrs. Mearely!"

"Yes," she laughed back at him, cheerily. "Wasn't that a lucky shot? It hit you, didn't it?"

"Mrs. Mearely!" (What *was* that colour?)

"You'd better put your hat on again, to shade your eyes from the sun," she cautioned, for Mr. Albert Andrews's pale, prominent optics were almost popping out of their sockets.

"Mrs. Mearely!" (Surely that tint was blue? Now that she turned, and her body shadowed it from the sun's rays, it certainly looked as blue as Mrs. Bunny's inch of baby ribbon.)

"I want to ask all sorts of favours of you, Mr. Andrews." She paused, with her pretty head perked on one side. It was her fashion to request favours with this little flirt and smile which suggested, with guileless conceit, that to serve any one so beautiful and so young was payment enough and to spare for any man in Roseborough. Little did she remember at this moment, however, the results of that same perking from her father's farm gate, when Hibbert Mearely had asked her to tell him if he had, or had not, taken the wrong turning at the bridge.

"Mrs. Mearely!" (He would dare to believe it blue. He would act as if it *were* blue!)

"What on earth is the matter with the poor man? He'll be as red as a beanflower in a minute," ran through her mind. Aloud she said: "I know you are making your collecting rounds and you will pass Dr. Wells's and Mr. Howard's and also Judge Giffen's. Will you deliver a message at each house for me?"

A gulp was the only reply, for a second or two. It meant that Mr. Andrews was done with "dumb yearnin'." (The dress was, unquestionably, blue.)

"Mrs. Mearely! I beg you to listen to what I am about to say." The words tumbled out pell-mell,

now that he knew blue for what it was; in Mrs. Bunny's phrase, they "bust out." "I will take any message of yours, every message, wherever and whither you may send it. I shall be honoured—nay, more, pleased."

Surely she could not mistake such ardour! he had declared himself, and as a man of honour, would stand by this avowal. He waited breathlessly for her answer.

"Splendid!" She clapped her hands. "Then you shall ask the Wellses and the Judge and Wilton to come for cards this evening. Mrs. Witherby and her daughter and niece are coming; and Mrs. Lee, who has some news for us all. You will come, of course, won't you? I am relying on you."

(She was relying on him—in blue!)

"Mrs. Mearely!"

"Well, then, *say* that you will," she prompted, inwardly provoked by what she regarded as a stupid man's more than usually dense mood, and remembering that it would be wise to peep into the oven to see how Dom Paradis's "goodlie hearte's" cake was behaving in a modern cook stove.

He removed his hat again. He spoke solemnly.

"I will," he said—even as he had said it, thirteen years ago, at St. Jephtha's altar.

"Thank you ever so much, Mr. Andrews. Now I must run along in . . . "

"Mrs. Mearely!"

"Yes? Were you about to say something?"

(*Was* he about to say something? She was leading him on—in blue!)

"Mrs. Mearely! I *have* said it. Mrs. Mearely, did you understand the purport of what I said to you just now?"

"What did you say to me just now, Mr. Andrews?"

Such smiles leaning to him over the low wall; such large blue eyes, flecked and changing from grave to gay; and behind and about this entrancing jewel of a woman her opulent setting of the Villa Rose estate! He grew dizzy. Her dress was blue; and she was eager to hear him repeat the declaration he had already made to her! This could mean only one thing, he was convinced. She had observed his devotion and secretly coveted him. She had noticed that he *hovered* and had approved his brooding flutter. In short, she had donned that blue satin to allure him; and had hung her charms upon the wall, that morning, because she well knew he must pass by.

Mr. Albert Andrews was the average, simple, masculine creature, making up for other deficiencies by an excellent conceit of himself. The tradition of his sex—that woman is the pursuer, because she recognizes the superiority of the male and wishes to entrap a specimen of the wonderful species for her

glory—comprised the major part of Mr. Andrews's knowledge of the feminine. He had not learned more during his marriage, because his satisfied opacity was proof against all attempts to instruct.

It was to him wholly natural that Rosamond Mearely—being, for all her beauty and wealth, only a woman after all and therefore an inferior—should have decided to entrain him; because, forsooth, he was a man. He did not see how she could have chosen better in all Roseborough.

Literally he rose to do that which was demanded of him; for he stood up in his cart and laid hold of the wall with both hands. By standing on tiptoe he could just reach the ledge near where her two finely turned arms rested.

"Goodness me!" she exclaimed with a trace of the Poplars Farm in her accents. "Suppose your horse walks off and leaves you hanging to my wall like—like a tom-cod in a fish market?"

He interruped her.

"Mrs. Mearely! I said just now that I would carry any message of yours wherever and whither you desire. I said even more. I said that I would be *pleased* to do so. I meant it. I mean it still. Mrs. Mearely! Can I tell you—may I tell you . . ." He gulped. "Mrs. Mearely I have long—Mrs. Mearely! I have often thought over the little sentiments I might one day express to you. That is

to say, when I should see you again as I see you now, that is to say, without the black-edged habiliments of woe . . ."

"Oh, my frock? I see. You are going to pay me compliments."

(She was asking him to pay her compliments! She was making it easy for him!)

He beamed at her—the eager, engaging young creature, so artful, yet artless, too—the pursuing feminine.

"I have considered, in a poetical way, what I would say if I saw you first in something—er—green. Some little phrase about the grass and verdant innocence. Or, in pink. I had that thoroughly outlined, too; because we thought, Mrs. Bunny and I, that the likeliest hue would be a pastel pink."

Her fair white forehead puckered; her perfect eyebrows lifted.

"Mrs. Bunny? Pastel pink?" She sought enlightenment.

"One moment. I would then have likened you to a rose and a sea-shell, both chaste similes and very pretty conceits. But now I can say to you, that you are most fair in this colour since it is the colour of the sky, therefore—may we not say?—(I think we may) the colour of heaven—and of my birthstone, the aquamarine, and, ah!—the colour of your eyes."

"What?" She was startled.

"Blue sky—that is to say, blue heavens—blue birthstone, blue dress, blue eyes; gown and eyes a perfect match . . ."

"Mercy! I hope not," she burst out laughing. "Whatever makes you think this frock is blue? Or do my eyes look like lavender to you?"

Mr. Andrews's rather loose under jaw slipped down, the smiles of rapt satisfaction faded. Slowly he turned a purplish red that passed off in a chill.

"Mrs. Mearely," he asked hoarsely. "Did you say that gown is l—lavender?"

She shrieked joyously. Then, taking pity on his plainly revealed agony of mind, tried to control her laughter.

"Yes. At least, it is lilac; but they are much alike. Lavender, lilac . . ."

"Stop!" he gasped.

"Mauve, heliotrope," she tipped them off merrily on her digits. "Amethyst." She crooked her little finger.

"Don't," he groaned.

"Wood-violet." She waggled the thumb of her other hand.

"Lavender!" He sank back into the seat of the cart like a stone into the sea.

"Or lilac. But it doesn't match my eyes, Mr. Andrews; no, really, I haven't lavender eyes."

She found his error too entertaining and, ceasing her kind attempt at gravity, she bubbled gaily.

"Lavender," he muttered. He thought with gruelling shame of how he had "bust out," and added: "I have been indelicate."

"Oh, why take it so seriously?" she giggled. "I'm not offended. I'm—I'm—laughing."

He could hear that she was!—but the ripples of her mirth fell balmless upon his wound. His sober, orderly, plodding mind was in a perilous whirl. She had *not* lured him; she had *not* been waiting for him, as the desirous feminine awaiteth the superior being. Tradition itself, the perfect tradition of the sexes, was exploding like firecrackers in the little hisses and snickers that went off just above his humbled head. He doubted that he would be able even to "hover" in silence—with his wonted dignity and optimism—for some time to come.

"Lavender," he repeated. He gathered up the reins, hardly knowing that he did so, and motioned the stocky pony away from the vine-clad walls of Mockery's citadel.

"Don't forget to give my messages," she called after him. "Cards at Villa Rose this evening. Don't be later than seven."

He might still be muttering "Lavender" as he went on his way; but there was just one colour, at that moment, of which Mr. Albert Andrews was

positive, and that colour was gray. All the world was gray, drab-gray.

Rosamond ran into the house to examine Dom Paradis's cake, but, while she poked a sprig from the broom into its dough, she was still pondering Mr. Andrews's odd behaviour.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed as she found to be satisfactory what the end of the bent straw revealed. "Rosamond, dear, do you suppose that dubby thing was making love to you? Is that what will happen to you, Rosamond, now that you have put off the last black ribbon? Haven't you seen it coming? Proposals from the stupid men and gossip from the catty women, till they *make* you marry somebody—somebody *old!* Rosamond, dear, you simply must go in search of that irredeemably *bourgeois* lover this afternoon. And you have no time to lose."

However, she refused to be downcast. There would still be six hours of sun in this day—even if His Frigg.ts came back to-morrow.

She was so busy in the kitchen and pantry that she did not hear one o'clock ring from the tower bell at twenty minutes past the hour. The toll-man, being full of years and midday dinner, had fallen asleep immediately after tucking away his meal. On awaking he decided, very sensibly, to ignore the occurrence, and to ring the hour as usual, no matter what the time might be.

CHAPTER IX

DOM PARADIS'S cake, as modified by Rosamond of Roseborough and twentieth century dietetic caution, came from the oven a golden brown and snowy white success. Its odour was unique and delectable. Its weight was light as a puff. Rosamond surveyed it with a pride almost equal to that which must have extended the cheeks and bosom of its sybaritic inventor, Lallia y Poptu de Sillihofo Sanza, Countess of Mountjoye, when she first saw the glory she had evolved to deck the inner circles of her beloved. She sniffed it in long-drawn delight.

"Mum-mum—ooh-h! No wonder he ate himself to death for love of you, Contessa! I wonder if Dom Jack, the Prince of Roseborough, is *fat?*"

She dropped herself into Amanda's apron again and set about preparing the icing. Countess Lallia had called it:

A stylle and stykkie sauce of the smoothe colour of a pearle but lyke to a paste wych dydde covere my cake about lyke a napkyn, as it were a mysterie.

"I think my icing will be nicer than yours, Contessa—without all that oriental sweetmeat chopped

fine and beaten into it. There will be less anticipatory excitement about my cake and more of the calm satisfaction one feels when one knows what is coming next. You had so many mixed spices and sweets and flavours in your cake that Dom Paradis could not possibly tell from one bite what the next would taste like. There is a modern slang term that describes the culinary tactics you employed on the prince's appetite—you 'kept him guessing.'"

At first the whole conceit of the Countess of Mountjoye's cake—"devysed and styrred first in the yeare 1715," and now reproduced in almost identical mixture from the old recipe—had seemed to her deliciously humorous. She had chuckled and chattered over it to herself and extracted from it a larger degree of the essence of mirth than had come to her palate and nostrils in many weeks; for it cannot be denied that life at Villa Rose lacked brightness. A mansion full of antiques, with no human associates but servants of the same vintage, did not provide the kind of environment which spontaneously generates happiness in the heart of youth. Hibbert Mearely's widow had been a prisoner in her own grandeur, daily acquainted with that state which, to the young, is worse than sharp grief, namely, boredom.

To-day, with the departure of His Friggets, and the new meeting with her young heart—which had taken place when she regarded herself in the Orleans mirror

—a joy had awakened within her like the return of her girlhood. So vivid a joy it was, so brave and confident, that it had sent her forth singing salutations to herself, as if she believed the whole sun-filled, rose-scented earth were calling to her in that syren phrase, "Good-morning, Rosamond!"

How swiftly joy had unfolded hope! And how naturally, inevitably, both had promised love! Permeated with them, she had defied Villa Rose and its antiquities to hold her spirit twenty-four hours longer. Lo, a day was given her—a *Wonderful* Day. In it she might recapture her lost heritage—romance.

Now, while she beat white of egg and powdered sugar together to make the fundamental paste of the icing for the Paradis cake, an indefinable sense of sorrow descended upon her. Thought lost its elasticity of hope—it lagged and drooped. A lassitude crept over her whole person. Her eyelids felt hot and heavy. There was a pressure on her head that kept it from tossing in the air after its wonted fashion like a proud hollyhock.

"Everything is going wrong," she whispered. "I have a presentiment of it—just as if some dreadfully unhappy thing had taken place and I was about to hear of it." A tear fell, hit the rim of the soup plate in which she was beating the icing, and, luckily, rolled off instead of in. Both eyes filled again. She wiped them on the back of her arm, and, by this

mournful gesture, sent a trail of icing across the wall from the fork in her hand.

"I never felt so sad in all my life," was her inward admission, as she set about filling the cake with the cooked concoction of chopped figs, nuts, raisins, and candied fruit that made two inches of lusciousness between the layers. This fruity mixture, further complicated with the oriental "sweets and spyces" of her period, Countess Lallia had poured into the centre of the original cake and baked the whole together. In Rosamond's day, fortunately for the more nervous digestive apparatus of current humanity, wisdom has reduced weightiness in cookery—hence the layer cake.

She proceeded to encase the whole—a large, imposing square of three layers—in the "stylle and stykkie sauce of the smoothe colour of a pearle."

She went about it slowly and with downcast mien—sighing and sniffing—tears welling over her lids. When she had put the perfected achievement away in the pantry to await its modern Dom Paradis, she sank down in the kitchen rocker and let woe take its way with her. She thought of her high hopes of the morning and marvelled at the malevolent power of fate, which could change those hopes, at the noon hour, into vague, insidious griefs. Her body seemed to have lost its substance, to be let out into space. She felt vacant and psychic.

"Something dreadful is going to happen," she whimpered. "I feel my heart sinking right out of me."

She wished that she were not alone. The big house, so silent and aloof, was oppressive. She questioned if it were safe for her to remain there, solitary, and decided that she would have Blake sleep in the house that night.

"I'd give anything right now to have His Friggets walk in and say 'It's a quarter to one, Mrs. Mearely. I persoom you'll like your lunch.' That reminds me," she added, "I suppose it must be almost that time now."

Unable to see the clock from where she sat she rose listlessly.

"Ten minutes past one? Why—no! It is the long hand that is at one. Surely it can't be five minutes past *two!*"

She was still denying this when the bell rang from the tower by the river.

"*Two o'clock!* Two—and I haven't had my lunch. Why, I—I'm *starving!*"

Discovery of the true cause of her sudden malady went far toward curing it. She ran to the larder, to see what cold fare she could find there, all ready to be devoured without delay in preparation. She thought, with compunction, of the faithful Friggets, always as punctual as time itself, who would never

have let her fall into this pathos of the interior vacuum, had a greater grief not called them from her service.

She found so many dishes, that she might have wondered if His Friggets had not been secretly preparing for a party, except that she knew well their one extravagance. They *would* cook, when the spirit moved them. They were proud of their cooking; and they argued that what was uneaten could always be given to the clergyman, whose stipend was meagre, and what he did not devour he could pass on to the thirteen McGuires, who embodied Roseborough's poor. It must be confessed not only that the vicar was tempted from spiritual yearnings, by the tasty abundance of His Friggets' art, but that the thirteen McGuires were fattening like pigs. Their sleek looks mocked at sweet charity's very name. Mrs. McGuire, herself, had given up her random profession of charwoman, because, as she said: "Sure an' I've got too heavy to be bendin' me waist, and up and down on me knees, and the loike."

It occurred to Rosamond that His Friggets' extravagance in this one direction was fortunate for her, to-day, since it not only provided her with lunch but with refreshments for her guests of the evening. There were two large trembling jellies, bowls of cream, a junket, a whole roasted chicken

and a whole boiled one—["I'll turn the boiled one into a salad for to-night," she thought]—cold ham, which had been boiled in a pot of Amanda's own brew of currant wine, and half a dozen quart bottles of the parsnip wine, considered by Amanda, metaphorically speaking, as the diamond in her crown. All Roseborough admitted that Amanda Frigget's parsnip wine was so good, so golden, and so lively, that it both looked and tasted "exactly like champagne, except that, instead of the regular champagne taste, it had the taste of parsnips."

Rosamond appropriated the roast chicken and found bread and butter also for her needs. To these she added a tall glass of foamy milk. A crock filled with cookies was another pleasant discovery.

She pictured to herself, amid giggles, the expressions that would adorn the faces of Amanda and Jemima and all Roseborough if they could see the distinguished Hibbert Mearely's widow perched on the end of the kitchen table eating with her fingers.

"I suppose, if I were a born lady, I'd starve because there's no one here to set my lunch before me properly," she thought, "well, there are advantages in having a pedigree of butter pats."

As one second joint, followed by the other, was nipped all around neatly to the bone, and the milk followed the chicken fragments, Rosamond's indefinable sorrow vanished. She hung Amanda's apron

on its hook, and ran upstairs to wash her face and hands and catch up a loosened curl or two.

She had decided to spend the afternoon hours in a nook she knew by the river, not a stone's throw from the bell tower. It was the loveliest spot in the valley and, unseen, one might watch the three roads that crossed one another at the tower. She needed a parasol, and ignoring the four black ones—one with lavender flowers—and the two black and white ones —the latest with a white chiffon frill—which, in their appointed order, had screened her grieved countenance during the last four years—she selected a shot silk of a grass green, its brightness tempered with silver gray. As she set out from the house now, with its silken shade arched over her bright hair and bringing out every bit of life there was in her skin and her gown, even Mr. Albert Andrews could not have doubted that the young widow's mourning days were over.

With her hand on the latch of her gate, she paused. Far down the road, just on the near side of the bridge, she perceived Blake returning with the obstreperous mare. Even while she looked, she saw Florence rear and dart off down the road to Poplars. There was a trotting on the gravel road immediately round the curve of Villa Rose's line. In a moment the rider had reined in at the gate and uncovered in salute to her.

"I hope he doesn't think he has come to make a special call—he looks all dressed up—because I'm not going indoors again," was her mental greeting. Aloud, she said, cordially, "Good afternoon, Judge Giffen."

CHAPTER X

IN ROSEBOROUGH, as has been remarked, Judge Giffen was universally listed by the adjective "imposing." Those spinsters with clinging natures preferred to describe him as "authoritative." Miss Palametta Watts, who was suspected (to put it mildly) of special leanings—not to say intentions—in his direction, called him "masterful." Quite recently Miss Palametta had boldly charged him with this trait; and, with the daring of desperate thirty-seven, had asked him if she were not correct in deducing from his stern mien that his wife, when he selected one, would be constrained to obey him; for her own part she knew *she* would.

"Such is the scriptural injunction," he pronounced after weighing the matter; but, to her disappointment, pursued the subject no further. To be sure, not having his glasses on at the time, he may not have seen her inviting looks.

Mrs. Witherby's dicta were taken as final in Roseborough, for it was conceded that she had "a wonderful way of expressing herself," and Mrs. Witherby had a vast admiration for Judge Giffen and frequently summed him up thus:

"Well, it may be true that the Judge has had more decisions reversed than any other judge in the land, and that but for Hibbert Mearely's influence he would never have been a judge at all; but what *I* always say is, 'Where in all Roseborough (or elsewhere, either, for the matter of that) will you find a man who has such an *air* about him?' Judge Giffen is a gentleman who understands his own worth. One can see that at a glance."

One could see it at a glance this afternoon as he rode forward. It was emphatically a man with a fine understanding of his own worth whom the large, flea-bitten white horse brought to pause at Villa Rose's gate. Though above medium stature, he was still not so tall as he appeared, from the height of his collar and the lofty manner of carrying his head. It was this last habit in particular, no doubt, which gave him the "air" so much admired.

His hair was graying with an even pepper-and-salt sprinkling. He allowed it to grow long in front, that his small, square forehead might be ornamented with a "statesman's lock." His eyes were small and brown and of no marked luminosity or keenness; his pepper-and-salt eyebrows were short and highly peaked at the outer corners—a sign, phrenologists declare, of latent ferocity. Doubtless the eyebrows assisted Miss Palametta Watts to her definition of "masterful." He wore a short-cropped moustache

naturally, and affected an imperial and goatee. His morals, of course, like all Roseborough morals, were above reproach. His hobbies were chess and the *Weekly Digest*, which gave him the news of the world in twelve pages of small paragraphs with inserts of verse, fiction, humour, publisher's advertisements, and editorials on all world-wide topics, from single tax to the Oriental problem and back by way of the clam middens of British Columbia to the Greek schism and free verse. By lingering and studious perusal, he managed to make each week's *Digest* last until the post brought the next.

For the rest, he dwelt in apartments in the house of a Mrs. Taite, a gentlewoman fallen into adverse circumstances, who was willing to take in and care for a paying guest in order to eke out. He lived in an economical and dignified style, and kept two horses, on the means which could very much better have been applied to the purchase of a neat cottage to shelter a wife. At least such was the opinion of Roseborough's spinsters.

Perhaps the Judge did not treat the Roseborough spinsters quite fairly. The legal mind, by reason of its professional habits, becomes versed in subtleties, evasions, and the like—"technicalities" as they are called. The judge's apartments were sincerely and solidly furnished by Mrs. Taite; but they were decorated with technicalities and evasions. In this

wise: on the slippery horsehair sofa (supplied by Mrs. Taite) there was a row of cushions contributed by hungry hearts. They were stuffed with rags, excelsior, goose feathers, or ducks' down, according to the financial rating of Miss Hopeful; and covered with crochet, tatting, crazy-quilt patches, sampler, or crewel work, according to her taste and her proficiency with the embroidery needle, the bobbin, or the small steel hook. One sampler-topped pillow bore the legend, tidily cross-stitched in a circle: "When here you rest your weary head, dream of the Giver." The Judge had accepted the cushion and highly complimented the workmanship, vaguely maundered on the sweet thoughts that natively abide in woman's breast, and set the pillow at the *foot* of the sofa. As his stockinged or slippered pedal extremities were not dreamers, he could use the gift without troubling his weary head about the giver. Thus, it will be seen, that the learned jurist could appropriate the soft advantages of a tentative contract, and escape the expected payment on a technicality, as well as any man he ever solemnly upbraided in court for the same act.

"I know what *I* should like to do with these rooms," Miss Hopeful would say, with arch looks.

The Judge would answer promptly:

"What, for instance?"

He was, in his way, a shrewd man as a man who

knows a trifle about horses is apt to be. He asked purposely, because, since the spinsters of Roseborough were each and all "homey" women, domestic by training, he had found that their suggestions, when followed out, added to the comfort of his bachelor life.

Encouraged by his receptivity, the lady would express her idea and even offer to come and assist "dear Mrs. Taite" in putting it into effect. More than one damsel had spent her half hour mounted on a kitchen stool, with her mouth full of tacks, while dear Mrs. Taite handed the hammer back and forth and made mental note of defects in the aspirant's figure to retail later to the judge, who liked what he called "a well-turned woman." To retain her paying guest was Mrs. Taite's life-work.

To tell the truth, the Judge had been in no haste to woo. He was not touched with Romeo's fever. His temperament was judicial and calm. He was—it may again be remarked—shrewd. He knew to a penny exactly what his monthly income could do for him in the way of providing a Roseborough gentleman's requisites, and he was in little danger of deliberately seeking to curtail his small personal luxuries by taking a dowerless wife. So he listened the more appreciatively to his landlady's analyses of the dispositions and physical characteristics of Roseborough's spinsters.

"Knowledge is power," he would aver with a solemn sort of waggishness, when she had permitted him to gather, from her discourse, that there was not an ankle among the lot which would dare show itself in a plain white stocking; or that a certain melting-eyed one's shoulder blades or hip bones were "at least no sharper than her *temper*." He knew from other of Mrs. Taite's hints—dropped generally while stirring a hot cup of chocolate for his nightcap and buttering a toasted scone to accompany it, that some young ladies who owned to twenty-six would never see thirty-three again, and that a baby-waisted white muslin frock was no longer the badge of a guileless heart, as it had been in the days when *she* wore one to induce that maiden's shock, the first kiss.

What with Mrs. Taite's chocolate and subtlety and the judge's legal technicalities, it will be seen that the Roseborough spinsters were out-generalled. They had once been a threat; but, nowadays, there was scarcely the aroma of danger surrounding them. Mrs. Taite felt that the menace to her came from another quarter. It had (as she mentally phrased it) "struck upon her bosom and fairly winded her" one evening when Judge Giffen had remarked, between chocolate sips, that Mrs. Mearely had received him that afternoon in a black-and-white striped gown. Unlike Mr. Albert Andrews, the Judge

rather prided himself on having an eye for feminine apparel.

"And she looked uncommonly well in it, too," he added. "A very well-turned woman is Mrs. Mearely. Yes, Mrs. Taite, I believe poor dear Mearely's taste to have been as infallible in that case as in every other."

"Mr. Hibbert Mearely had the large means necessary to indulge a woman of such extravagant fancies." In Mrs. Taite's voice there was a tremolo as she shot the only dart she could find at that moment, knowing, alas, that it was unbarbed save to her own heart.

"And now *she* has the means, and none to please but herself."

The landlady attempted to retrieve her error.

"Considering her humble origin, I should hope she'd spend her life henceforth as an offering to her distinguished husband's memory." This conversation had taken place on a winter's evening, but that was not the reason why Mrs. Taite's teeth chattered.

"Ah, no doubt—for a year or so. Mearely, himself, was a great stickler for form, and he trained her in the niceties of observance. Her origin—that is to say, the butter pats and so on—is a forgotten myth in Roseborough now."

"Among the *men*, perhaps."

"A forgotten myth, Mrs. Taite. Mearely put the quietus on it by his will. He left her everything. I

drew it up, you know. Yes; he was in the pink of condition at the time—the very pink. Whoever thought he would go to his last account not three months later?" He mused on this so long that Mrs. Taite, anxious to get to the terms of the will and learn the worst she had to fear, put in a remark to bring him back to the theme.

"Cholera Morpheus, was it not?"

"*Morbus*, Mrs. Taite, *morbus*—a latin word meaning—er. Yes. Poor dear Mearely said to me: 'I am a healthy man and the Mearelys are a long-lived family. I except to see ninety and bury my wife a dozen years earlier, as my grandfather did before me. However, we are all mortal and subject to climate and accident. I may die to-morrow and leave Mrs. Mearely a widow. I w[illegible], ought I make the proviso that she must lose [illegible] fortune, if she marries again? What would you advise?' "

"And what *did* you advise, Judge Giffen?" Mrs. Taite trembled.

"Ah, a really remarkable thing! I advised against it, and he didn't do it."

"What a calamity!" Mrs. Taite cried out in spite of herself, and hastened to add: "Leaving her at the mercy of fortune hunters."

"I said that, in the very unlikely event of her being left a young widow, it would be better that she should have the responsibility of living up to the

Mearely name and estate. This duty would guide her choice in re-marriage. Whereas, without responsibilities, she might hark back to the farm strain and contract a union which would be a slur on the Mearely honour. He perceived the point, and, after providing for a few bequests to relatives, he left her everything, on condition that she continued to live in Villa Rose. 'For,' said he, 'I won't have her running up and down Europe, spending money to fatten a conscienceless army of waiters, guides, and *concierges*. Let her remain quietly at home and continue to carry out my artistic scheme, as the one rustic and indigenous object of beauty in the midst of my priceless antiques and *objets d'art.*' That was his idea. A very superior man—was my dear friend, Mearely."

"So Mrs. Mearely has control of her fortune and is obliged to live in Roseborough? Then she is compelled to choose a man from these parts."

"Yes. If she leaves Villa Rose and Roseborough, she loses everything. Yes, it was I who drew up that will, Mrs. Taite. I relate the facts to you now in strict confidence, relying on your discretion. You have been my confidante for a number of years, Mrs. Taite, and I believe there is no woman in Roseborough so discreet."

Whereupon, Mrs. Taite had besought him to continue this reliance, as no word of his confidences

had ever passed, or should ever pass, her lips; but she believed that the will's terms were not unknown in Roseborough; she had heard rumours, indeed, though she had not credited them. Perhaps, she thought, Mr. Howard, being a distant cousin of Mr. Mearely's, had felt privileged to inform Roseborough. On the contrary, the Judge argued, Mr. Howard had known nothing of this proviso. He was sure of that.

"Poor Howard would have been left out entirely but for me. I got his little legacy for him. So much per year, you know—just enough to keep him, if prices don't soar. I pointed out to Mearely that Howard is really an excellent chess player."

Mrs. Taite, of course, had never heard the terms of the will as they affected Mrs. Mearely's re-marriage. When she said she had heard rumours she meant that she was about to set some afloat. She put on her bonnet and took two pennies to the Widower's Mite Society's treasurer, Mr. Albert Andrews, and dropped the hint which, in due course, matured into the aim of his life. It was she who told the news to Wilton Howard, amid sly compliments; again sowing seed which, though ignored at the time, was to bear fruit later.

Mrs. Taite saw that the Judge was deliberately considering the pros and cons of a union with the young widow when all her black should have been put by, and she intended that he should not lack

rivals. She knew that his legal mind would take its time in coming to a decision, and that his self-sufficient nature would neither anticipate rivals nor that the widow might say him nay. Meanwhile, there was the one chance in a hundred that Mrs. Mearely might marry a faster moving admirer.

She racked her brains for schemes to balk him. She even thought wildly of sending Mrs. Mearely anonymous letters, or of poisoning Villa Rose's well by dropping a murdered cat into it. She nursed her fears in secret, copiously wept, prayed nightly that a worthy gentlewoman might not be brought to penury through the unnecessary matrimony of a paying guest, and took to walking at midnight, shut-eyed, in her nainsook and curl rags.

Meanwhile the judge had handed down his decision, and he apprehended no reversal of it by the higher court, i. e., by fair Rosamond herself. He felt that he, of all men, deserved her fortune because it was he who had prevented a pen-stroke from depriving her of it. Having accepted his decision, he began to formulate a plan of procedure. He rode out to Trenton churchyard and verified the date on the headstone. From that he computed a proper date for proposal, which appeared to be midsummer week, a year and six months from the day on which Mrs. Mearely had received him in black and white. He would go to see her—say, on a Wednesday—and

inform her, in dignified yet adequate language, of the part he had played in smoothing life for her. She would have until Sunday to regard him as a benign fate and to become so mellowed with gratitude that, when he returned on the Sabbath afternoon to make formal offer of himself, she would answer with blushing enthusiasm, "Oh, be my fate again—a second time, and forever."

Unaware that this midsummer day was Rosamond's "Wonderful Day" (though, if he had known, he would have found the fact pleasantly apropos) or that she had given up her last attenuation of mourning only a few hours before he set out to make this preliminary and way-paving call—resolved upon, even to the date, eighteen months previously—Judge Giffen nosed his flea-bitten white horse up to the gate post, removed and replaced his tall hat in high and solemn salutation, slipped off his glove (gray, with two pearl buttons), enclosed Rosamond's rosy palm, and said in the tone of one who conveys information of grave import:

"Good-afternoon, my dear Mrs. Mearely."

Almost simultaneously he noticed the green-gray shot parasol and the lilac-bud silk gown and was distinctly pleased by the omen. It was, indeed, as if she had expected him.

CHAPTER XI

COURTESY commanded Rosamond to open the gate and invite the Judge in. She disobeyed. She leaned over the bar, so that he himself could not effect entrance, and said sweetly:

"How fortunate that you arrived at this moment and not later. For I can at least exchange a word of greeting with you ere I continue on my way."

He pondered this unforeseen contingency. That she might not be at home to receive him on the day set had never occurred to him.

"You are going out?"

"I am obliged to go. It is an unescapable duty that I must perform."

"Surely you are not going any distance on foot?"

"Oh—er—the carriage will be here in a moment," she said hastily. "Er—in fact—I think I hear it—I mean, see it—down the hill. Isn't that Blake now, driving in from the Poplars road?" She shaded her eyes and peered, as if she were honestly trying to distinguish the driver of a romping steed, which was just then taking the lowest turn of the hill at a gallop.

By strategy and force, Blake had succeeded in driving the mare round the tower and back to the Roseborough road.

"Ah, yes, Blake. You know I advised poor dear Mearely to sell Florence; but he said she was such a beautiful creature that he would rather risk his neck with her than sit safely behind an ugly beast. I should advise you to use Marquis, my dear lady. That mare is not reliable."

"So Blake says. He threatened to take her to the farm yesterday. But he also says he can manage her; and, as he always *does* manage her I take his word for my safety and don't worry."

The Judge had a happy thought.

"You may regard your own safety thus lightly, fair lady. But will you not consider the place you hold in *our* hearts? Can any gallant man in Roseborough think of your unprotected loveliness in danger and keep his pulses steady?"

Inwardly Rosamond registered another plaintive and helpless protest against the misuse of her bright gown which circumstance was making that day. "They'll drive me back to crape," she said to herself, "in order to have my adventures free from persecution." Aloud she said, veiling her eyes till they were only a peep of sparkling blue heavens through clouds:

"I have begun to feel lately that Roseborough's

gentlemen have indeed—so to speak—a perception of my lonely state."

"Ah. As to the others I can't say. They would hardly have the—ah—same interest as myself. No, hardly, I have a personal responsibility regarding you."

She interrupted quickly.

"Has your invitation reached you yet, for to-night?"

"Ah—yes. I thank you. I met Mrs. Witherby on the bridge. Ah—I was about to say . . ."

"Can that possibly be Florence pounding up the hill? Yes, it is. Dear me. Really, I wish she were more sedate, to-day of all days."

Rosamond was talking against time; her words meant nothing more than that she desired to keep the Judge at bay until the carriage arrived, when she would pretend she had visits to make and so dismiss him. Not understanding this, the Judge was inspired by her last sentence to a very pretty belief; namely, that Mrs. Mearely wished her mare to trot sedately on this day, because she was on her way to the cemetery; a visit to the Mearely plot being her delicate method of assuring both the departed and Roseborough that her return to colours betokened no frivolity of spirit—that she was still a Mearely and would maintain the Mearely dignity. This also, he thought, was a good omen for him; since there could

be no question about his superfitness to assist her in her loyal task.

"My dear lady . . ." He spoke with a slow profundity which made the blinking, sparkling eyes open wide at him. "You are on the way to his—ah—grave. I understand. I may say I more than understand. I will postpone until this evening—ah—the communication I came here to make to you. Um—ah—drop a posy—ah—on the poor fellow for me, will you not?"

Rosamond stared at him as blankly as any milkmaid.

"*What?*" said she, with unmodified bluntness.

Whatever might have developed, in the course of explanation, was prevented by a rival emissary of fate, with less propriety and more force than Judge Giffen. Florence rounded the curve. She had the bit in her teeth and blood in her eye—and the devil himself in her heels and her head. Blake was chiefly occupied in administering punishment. If she *would* bolt, she should do it under the whip, until discouragement set in.

Florence, being dumb, could not explain what it was about the stolid, large, high-backed, flea-bitten white horse (and possibly his imposing master) which irritated her beyond endurance; but she expressed herself after her temperament. She swerved from the road and, charging upon the unsuspecting

nag—whose back was toward her, his head sunk in the timothy along the wall—bit him sharply on the rump. The flea-bitten white was less stolid than he looked. He emitted a shrill snort and kicked with all his might; the Judge lost his hat and almost lost his seat. Florence pranced in and nipped the other side. Whereupon the flea-bitten white sounded his protest to all the world, reared, turned and ran at a racing gait down the hill. The Judge's *pince-nez* flew off in one direction and his crop in the other; the bridle had already been jerked from his easy hold, so that it is no slur on his horsemanship to say that Judge Giffen rode down the first two winds of the hill clinging to the pommel.

What of Florence? In sidling in to take her second nip, she had swung the light vehicle half-round, and now, ere Blake could get the mastery, she swung it all the way and charged off down the hill again. The pounding of hoofs on the gravel brought more than one Roseborough dweller to her front windows. Presumably Mrs. Mearely's were not the only eyes to see the *finale*. The judge's horse, ignoring the shouts of the toll-man and the closing of the bridge to let a tow go by, leaped the gates and the towline and galloped over the bridge and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Blake's experience was less happy. Florence did not include the carriage in her calculations, but at-

tempted to perform the same feat. She got through the barrier, by taking it with her; but the wheels were tipped by the fence rails, the vehicle rose upon its side and Blake dived, as if from a springboard, into the river. His aquatics seemed to satisfy Florence's passion for excitement for that day at least. She righted herself deftly and began to crop the clover beside the path, all mildness now as to mien.

The men on the barge fished Blake out with ropes and a hook. He was none the worse evidently, for he climbed to his seat and started Florence homeward under a harsh hand.

Until then Mrs. Mearely had had the grace to resist the temptation to laugh. Now the storm took her, and shook her the worse for her repression. She laughed until she was so limp that she was obliged to hang on to the gate to keep from falling, and then she laughed until she was so limp that she could no longer hold to the gate. She collapsed in a bed of mignonette and sweet alyssum, green parasol and all, exactly as if some one had broken off a big bunch of lilac and tossed it there. In the end, she turned over on her side, laid her head on a white close-growing pillow of alyssum and wept quietly, because flesh and blood could bear no more.

Thus Blake found her, when dripping coachman and foaming mare stopped at the gate.

"By the Lud! Mrs. Mearely, mum, are ye in a swound? The dundered 'oss 'll kill us all afore she's contented."

"No, Blake. I—I'm all right now," Rosamond answered weakly. "What—what do you suppose is the matter with the mare?"

"The mare," he exploded wrathfully. "Well, mare she may be, an' mare she is; but a lady she ain't, nor never will be! She's a wicious, a indecent, an' a cavortin' female—an' 'eadstrong, also, like all of her sect. I never saw a female of any specie that was wuth her salt; an' they're that irksome they wears a man out with chastisin' of 'em. Soon as I've got a dry change on me, I'm a-goin' to take this she-*himp* of Satan out to the farm; and I'll give her such a what-for on the road as'll tone down her 'abits, or I'm but a ol' feeble liar."

"You'll bring Marquis back?"

"Ay, mum. Marquis is a gentleman. But I won't be bringin' 'im till to-morrow afternoon, or mebbe next day. It's accordin'. Look at her—the deceiver! To see her now, you'd say she wouldn't steal oats. Ugh! You 'ap'azard critter! Did you see what she done, mum? Did you see what she done to his honour, the Jodge—to his honour, Jodge Giffen? 'As she got any rev'rence to her? Not a penn'orth! She prances on to the werry dignity of the Court, an' rares up an' bites his

Sycle-hops. Ugh! You 'eretic! Bitin' the werry dignity of the Court in his Sycle-hops!"

"Bites? Blake, what on earth do you mean?" She asked the question in trepidation, lest the strange word prove a disguise for some indelicacy, Blake being simple and rustic of speech.

"His Sycle-hops. His 'oss, mum. His brown 'oss is named 'Seep-yer'—for the colour, he says; w'ich is some sort of a 'igh-tone joke befittin' a Jodge, no doubt. An' the flea-bitten w'ite he calls Sycle-hops, says he, account of him bein' sech a 'uge 'oss an' one eye a bit better'n t'other." Mrs. Mearley's recently acquired knowledge of mythology came to her aid.

"Oh! Cyclops!" She was relieved.

"Jes' wot I said. An' that's wot this wicious an' wulgar female of her sect's gone an' bit! I'm mortyfied, mum, plumb mortyfied. I'll drive round now an' get a dry change, afore the five teeth I've got drops out from chill; an' then I'll be off till to-morrow—or next day. It's accordin'. Ugh! You shameless, wile, an' himproper hanimal, you! I'll learn ye to respect the Courts o' the land."

"So you won't be here to-night. Very well. Hurry off at once, before you get more rheumatism. But I hope you won't whip Florence any more. I'm particularly fond of her. You must not be cruel to her, Blake."

"She's a female; an' wot else can ye do with a female? They're cavorters, from the first one down the line. If I'd a-ben Adam, I'd a-seen wot the A'mighty meant when he called it the tree o' knowledge—a tree full o' switches, that's wot! An' I'd a-stopped the cavortin' of the sect right there where it started. Yes, mum; H'eve would a-ben a different 'ooman if Timothy Blake had 'ad her. It would a-ben the makin' of her," he added regretfully. "Good-day, mum."

He did not turn his head as he drove off and, therefore, was not affronted by the sight of his mistress rocking with laughter.

"I wonder if the Judge's horse has stopped running yet?" she said to herself, and danced up and down on her toes with delight. "I shall always love Florence for that. I think she postponed a declaration."

Three o'clock did not sound from the stone tower. The toll-man became so interested in relating to a farmer, who was taking a load of live fowls to Trenton, the exciting story of Florence's achievements—with historical references to the Giffen and Mearely families, and notes on Blake's pedigree, also Florence's, besides digressions as to his own age, health, and episodic life-story—that three passed to four without interrupting his train of thought. When the farmer and his squawking equipage passed

on, the toll-man went into the tower to fill his pipe from the cut plug in his coat pocket, planning to take a few pleasant puffs before repeating the story all over again to a black-suited, black-whiskered stranger he saw reaching the bridge on the Trenton side. His coat hung under the clock; and, since the clock ticked at ten after four, he rang the hour. When he stepped out again, the stranger had disappeared. He did not observe an abnormal trembling of the tall rushes and sedges by the Roseborough slough, as if a large body were crawling among them.

CHAPTER XII

SINCE Blake would not be on the premises that night, Rosamond asked herself whether she ought not to go to Mrs. Lee's and engage Bella Greenup to stay the night at Villa Rose. She had never spent a night alone in the large house and questioned whether she cared to do so. In the end she dismissed the idea of a companion; for, as she reminded herself, the community had never had a burglar or even a burglar scare, and, while an occasional tramp might stray to the Trenton road, none had been known to climb the hill into the sacred precincts of Roseborough.

Like the toll-man, she was unaware that nearly an hour had slipped by in the combined delay of the Judge's call and Florence's manœuvres. Still under the impression that the afternoon was hers to spend by the river, she went into the house for more hair pins to catch up the curls, shaken loose by laughter and the mignonette's fingers. She satisfied herself that the Orleans mirror reflected a vision both fair and neat enough to entrance Love at sight, if he should come riding by where the rushes divided and made a peephole to the slough. Then she ran downstairs

again, but her gay song ceased in the shock of hearing four o'clock ring out—a shock by no means modified when she asked the kitchen clock for denial and saw the long hand at eleven minutes past the hour.

"Four o'clock! If Amanda were here she would be bringing me tea to the summer-house. It seems very late to go to the river; because, of course, I must have my supper at five-thirty as usual. Oh, dear! I ought to have it at five to-night; because they will all be here by seven, and I shall take so much longer than His Friggets would to get my own supper and wash up, and then set out all the things for them on the dining-room table . . . And, of course, if I don't have my tea now, I shall be hungry *before* five-thirty. Oh, dear! It would seem that His Friggets have their uses in my life, after all."

Another wave of indignation swept over her, to cool in despair, as she realized how her Wonderful Day had vanished, hour by hour, leaving her only the distressful discovery that colours were not going to free her. From now on she would risk a proposal from some tiresome man every time she stepped abroad, alone. As for the women . . . ! she trembled to think of the gossip that might gush forth as soon as they saw her. Tittle-tattle and unwelcome proposals! Were these to be her lot until, in desperation, she allowed herself to be persuaded by

one or other of Roseborough's gentlemen? Angry, helpless tears filled her eyes.

"If I were smothered in crape I could go anywhere alone, and do whatever I wanted to, without stupid, silly men intruding. I didn't know when I was well off," she whimpered. "I've never once got outside the gates of Villa Rose all this day!"

Barely one hour left! What should she do with it?

The question as to this hour, as with all the previous hours, was settled for her by Roseborough. A sound of wheels on the road ceased at her carriage-gate. In a trice, she saw the gate unlatched and borne inward by a short, stout woman in a white mull dress, and a white hat covered with a green mosquito-netting veil, which served to keep the dust from her broad, pink countenance. She wore also a very wide tartan sash with a large bunchy bow at the back, the worse for being much and heavily sat upon.

"Whatever on earth are The Kilties coming here for?" Rosamond asked herself with another rush of anger. "Isn't this just too awful?" She stamped her foot in vexation.

She did not need to see the cart come through to know that all three of the Misses MacMillan were about to honour her with a visit. Wherever one MacMillan went, all MacMillans went. While Miss

Elspeth held the gate open, a broken-kneed gray nag wobbled into the grounds, drawing a loose-wheeled, scratched cart, with one seat that could comfortably hold two, but always squeaked protestingly under three. Two more short, stubby, green-netted, white-frocked maids crowned the cart; both, like their eldest sister, displayed the MacMillan plaid.

To Rosamond's dismay, their cart was followed by a four-wheeler laden with furbelows. The spinsters of Roseborough always wore white fluffy frocks with bright ribbon sashes, in the summer, because they were "so young-looking" (the frocks, not the spinsters). The four-wheeler held two seats, one stool, and seven girls. Only two could sit on each narrow seat; but there was a stool wedged in between the seats and one sat on that, holding the sixth girl on her lap. The seventh stood partly on her own and partly on the fifth girl's feet, and held on with all her might to the back of the front seat to keep from toppling into the road. When the vehicle stopped and they all tried to get out, the whole looked more like a wrecked ice-cream cart than anything else, with the white flounces spilling and tumbling over the edge in every direction. These were the Misses Pelham-Hew.

Dr. Wells, Roseborough's highly trusted physician —a doctor of the old school and a man who loved his joke (no matter who else loved it not)—was fond of

saying that the difference between Jacob Pelham-Hew and his namesake in the Old Testament was that Jacob of the Bible waited seven years for one damsel whereas Jacob Pelham-Hew had seven damsels waiting for one man—a witticism considered very funny by everyone in Roseborough but the Pelham-Hews.

In the wake of the ice-cream cart came a scrawny sorrel, drawing a sulky. Miss Graham sat in the one bowl-shaped seat, very erect and mannish in demeanour with a tan coat over her white duck dress and sporting a "choker" with a gold horseshoe pin. Miss Imogen Graham let it be known that she was well able to take care of herself and despised men; indeed, she would not look at one, save to be courteous. That courtesy was the keystone of her character was at once made evident if there was a man in the room, for he never lacked her company.

Miss Palametta Watts and her mother in their phaeton brought up the rear. Miss Palametta was small—"a lean, simpering wisp of a thing," Mrs. Witherby called her. She possessed two brown eyes, with fairly good possibilities in the line of flirtation, and a bang of curly, brown hair that had received its first baptism of walnut tea—what is called "touching up"—just above the ears and at the long ends. Miss Palametta was arch. Some one had once told her that there was something birdlike in

the little tosses and dartings of her head on her long throat, with the unfortunate result that her head was now never still a moment and she twittered incessantly. Her mother, who was very fat and nearly stone deaf, accompanied her everywhere; for, as Miss Palametta said, she would not for worlds be classed with forward, modern women who showed themselves in public, unchaperoned. Under cover of her mother's deafness, the modest creature had practically proposed to every eligible man in Roseborough; and had so compromised one poor fellow that he fled to Trenton, and became a bank clerk, to escape the condemnation Roseborough heaped on any man who went so far and then refused his destiny.

Rosamond's surprise had turned to alarm by the time the Watts' chariot hove in sight.

"I'm not at home," she muttered, blankly. "*I am not at home.*"

What could be the cause of this white-starched avalanche descending upon her out of four creaking rigs? She was not left long in doubt.

"We've come to hear all about the new man!" they chorused, in running up the steps to her. "Mrs. Witherby says a new man is coming to Roseborough and you know all about him."

"I—er—I—I don't know anything about him," she stammered to the eager, glittered-eyed ones, cramming her in on every side.

"Oh, yes, you do! You've been told everything," Elspeth MacMillan shrilled in her ear from behind.

"His name is Jack Falcon and he used to go to Charleroy," her sister, Jeanie Deans MacMillan, supplemented from in front. "Mrs. Witherby says so."

"You needn't tell *me* anything about him," said Imogen Graham, in her deep voice, and giving her mannish choker a tug. "I despise men—in fact nothing—*nothing*—disgusts me like a man!" Any one of the group might have completed the sentence for her; they had all heard it so often.

"He's done something *famous*," Flora Macdonald MacMillan shrieked.

"He's made a lot of *money*," Anabeth Pelham-Hew called, pushing her head into Rosamond's ken under Imogen Graham's elbow. Anabeth was short, and Dr. Wells said her hair had grown thin on the top from scraping against her taller sisters' angles in order to thrust herself into notice.

"A lot of money," Anabel, her twin, echoed.

"A lot—a *lot* of money!" Justinia Pelham-Hew stuttered.

"Oh, yes! he's made a *lot* of *money*." Constanza Pelham-Hew came in with the longer repetition—the whole line—exactly as if the thing were a glee and she were concluding the first round.

"Oh! isn't it interesting?" Maravene Pelham-Hew trebled, taking up the second verse.

"Yes! *isn't* it interesting?"

"Oh! *so interesting!*"

Claribel and Berthalin Pelham-Hew generally expressed their view in duet form.

"But I don't know anything about Mr. Falcon. I really don't. He's a friend of Mrs. Lee's—I mean he was a pupil of the Professor's—years ago. He—he . . ." Rosamond stammered on, innocent that she was arousing the worst suspicions in the breast of the one silent maiden in the group, the chaperoned Palametta. "He—er—is coming home to-morrow—from Europe."

"Europe?"

"Europe?"

"Europe?" the MacMillans.

"For my part," Miss Graham boomed, "if you don't stop talking about that man I shall go home. Nothing," said she, putting her arms akimbo and nudging into the verandah rail—"*Nothing* disgusts me like a man!"

"I'd be so glad to—to—er—offer you tea," Rosamond said hastily, glad of a chance to change this embarrassing conversation, "only Amanda and Jemima are away for the day; and I've—er been out to tea myself—and—er—the fire's out. But I hope you've all had your tea."

"Mrs. Witherby wouldn't tell us a thing about the man."

"No! she didn't tell *us*, either."

"No! she thinks, if he has *money*, she'll get him for Corinne or her precious niece."

"We tried to get Mabel Crewe to come with us, but she said she didn't care whether the man came to Roseborough, or not!"

"*I've* always claimed that Mabel Crewe is insincere."

"It will be so nice to have another man at parties."

"Did you hear how *much* money he has?" a Pelham-Hew queried At the word "money" the chatter ceased; they all drew up at attention.

"I—that is—Mrs. Lee didn't say anything about money. No, really, she didn't." Rosamond felt as cruel as if she had wantonly run her hat pin into seven palpitating Pelham-Hew hearts. Income was so pinched and painful a strain in their home.

"Noth—ing—about—mon—ey?"

"You're either mistaken or you are amusing yourself at our expense, Mrs. Mearely!" A MacMillan's nerves were snapping and her voice was so sharp that it stung.

"Mrs. Witherby said positively he'd made a great success."

"Positively!"

"*Grea-at* success!"

"Yes—yes, Mrs. Lee said something of success," Rosamond admitted, but I—er—gathered that it was an *artistic* success."

"Ugh! the brute!" Miss Graham snarled. The others looked blank.

One cold titter broke the silence. It emerged from Palametta's thin lips. Everyone looked at her. They knew that titter of Palametta's.

"Why—of course," said Palametta as if she had discerned what should have been obvious to every one. "Why—of—course." She drawled it.

"Of course *what?*" Rosamond, the sometimes blunt, demanded.

"I've been noticing your gown and wondering why you won't tell us anything really about Mr. Falcon," she twittered archly, darting her head from side to side; but there was rather more of the snake than of the bird in her, as she did it.

"Miss Watts, what on earth do you mean?"

"Why, yes!" a MacMillan shrilled. "She's in colours!"

"Mrs. Mearely's in *colours*," the Pelham-Hew septet sounded the tocsin.

Rosamond's face blazed.

"There's no change in my dress," she asserted violently, "except that there are no black ribbons. I've often worn white—with flowers—in the evening. Why, the colour of this dress is"—she caught Pala-

metta's glittering gaze, then a Pelham-Hew's appraising eye, and, realizing that this feline bevy was not composed of the colour-blind, finished weakly—"well—it's a sort of lavender."

Miss Palametta tittered coldly.

"It's a sort that never grew in a border of fragrant remembrance round a last resting-place," the eldest and Scotchest of the MacMillans 'bur-r-red at her, sternly.

Anabeth Pelham-Hew's eyes filled with tears; not only did her lip tremble, but her chin wagged, with the volume and velocity of the fear that seized her.

"You—you—you've *had one* husband, you—you greedy thing!" She flung herself on Anabel's breast and cried hysterically.

"Well! I never!" Rosamond exclaimed hotly.

"Anabeth is su-subject to hys-s-teria," Justinia explained, as if all Roseborough did not know it. Roseborough held pronounced views regarding Anabeth's hysteria; views which coincided with Blake's on the cavorting of Eve and the remedy for it.

Never since she had come to reside in Villa Rose as milady, had a Roseborough spinster shown Mrs. Mearely anything but an almost sycophantic homage. But never until to-day had Mrs. Mearely clashed with a Roseborough spinster's hopes. Words and breath left her as she saw herself—so recently an

object of adulation—confronted with one dozen enemies.

"For my part, I'd be astounded if there were anything in this," Miss Graham averred, with another tug at her choker; "because I can't see how a widow could be induced to *hang* herself a *second* time. Nothing—*nothing* disgusts *me* like . . ."

"It's a great shock to all of us to see you in colours again," Flora Macdonald MacMillan broke in. "In all your days of mourning, no other hearts have beaten in such unison with yours as ours. We, the girls of Roseborough, have felt almost as if we were widows with you."

"Yes," her sister, Jeanie Deans, chimed in, "the girls of Roseborough loved to think of you as so beautiful and so sad, and forever alone."

"Oh, yes! *forever alone!*" Elspeth concurred emphatically.

"We girls have often talked about it," Maravene informed her; "we just love to picture you like a mourning dove . . ."

"A fading rose is what *I* always say, Maravene. I think it's more appropriate, besides sweeter," Constanza interrupted.

"I know you do, sister; but I like the mourning dove idea better. It's *lonesomer*."

Rosamond emitted an indignant sound nearly related to a snort.

"Stuff and nonsense! If that is the silly way you think about me, you can just give it up right now. It is time for me to put on ordinary colours and I intend to wear them—just as other people do. I am not in the least eager to meet Mr. Falcon, except for my dear Mrs. Lee's sake. You can have him, for all I care and—and tear him to bits among you! I forgot to tell you that he is quite an *old* man—with a gray beard—and a bald head."

"Oh—h! No—o!"

"Naturally—what I expected," Miss Graham began. "Nothing—nothing . . ." She paused a fraction of a second to give her choker the usual masculine tug, and Berthalin and Claribel burst in with:

"Old?—gray?—bald?—who says so?"

"Mrs. Lee says so."

"And she hasn't seen him for nearly twenty years," Palametta ruminated. "Oh, come now, Mrs. Mearely! Why can't you be as frank about your interest in the newcomer as we are? Tell us his real age," she tittered icily.

Rosamond's bosom swelled and her hands clenched as the flame of anger scorched her. It burned the more fiercely because she was, for the moment, wholly at the mercy of the spinsterial dozen. She could not force them to believe her: nay, it would appear that the only way to change the "girls"

of Roseborough from foes into friends again was to return to the raiment of Niobe.

"I am sorry, but I must ask you to excuse me." She tried to say it with the dignity of the Mearely name and Villa Rose behind her; "Mrs. Witherby and the Wellses and Mrs. Lee are coming in for cards this evening. And I must prepare for them. Amanda and Jemima are away for the day, and I have everything to do."

"Shall you wear colours at Mrs. Lee's breakfast to-morrow?" a MacMillan demanded.

"Yes! That is what we all want to know," a Pelham-Hew added.

As usual Rosamond's sense of humour overcame her anger.

"I will compromise the matter if you will only run away now, like good girls," she answered, laughing a little in spite of herself. "I will wear white—no ribbons. So put on your fanciest sashes and catch the poor old chap fast in the bow knots."

"Oh! Mrs. Mearely!" Elspeth MacMillan ejaculated, catching the infection of Rosamond's mirth, and smiling. "Of course—we only meant—we think it would be so nice to have another man at parties."

"So that we won't always have to dance together all our lives," the Pelham-Hews choired.

"Make a circle around him and pin your sash

ends to him as if he were a maypole; then, at the signal, all run in different directions and see which gets him—or the biggest piece of him."

"Oh! Mrs. Mearely!" every one but Palametta (and, of course, her deaf mother) exclaimed at once. Rosamond's bold speech had made them feel slightly absurd; they thought it best to laugh it off and make a joke of the whole affair.

"Anabeth is su-subject to hys-s-teria so that wh-hen she makes a je-jest she always c-cries," Justinia elucidated tactfully.

"Yes," Constanza amended, "we are not really all trying to catch a man we've never seen."

"And may not like when we *have* seen him!" Claribel concluded.

"Come on, girls," Imogen boomed. "Mrs. Mearely wants to get rid of us. Let's go down to Dollop's. I'll stand treat for one ginger syrup all around."

"Oh, goody!" "Oh, come on!" "Hooray!" "Imogen's going to treat." Her offer was greeted with the shouts of joy that generally follow on a treat, especially in communities like Roseborough. The seven Pelham-Hews, who never had pennies to spend in Dollop's, rushed, giggling, down the steps and scrambled over one another into their rig for all the world like a pan of dough "raising." The MacMillans followed as fast as was consistent with the

dignity of the clan's tartan. Palametta made a point of lingering to offer a limp handshake and, as her fingers slipped away and her head tossed and perked, she tittered faintly.

"If she te-he-hes like that at me again I'll box her ears," Rosamond vowed inwardly. An inspiration came to her, from the springs of her naturally impulsive generosity, which went far to restore her to her former position in the hearts of Roseborough's spinsters.

"Wait, wait," she called. "I'll give you some bottles of Amanda's parsnip wine. That will be better than Dollop's syrup. And a basket full of glasses and some ginger cookies, and you can picnic down by the tower in that little nook of the slough."

Not delaying for more than the first "hooray," she caught up her flower basket from the porch and ran into the kitchen. To fill the basket with glasses, cookies, and the three quart bottles was the work of only a few minutes. She confided the precious cargo to the MacMillans and smilingly waved off her now friendly guests, who departed amid subdued and genteel cheering. Imogen even baritoned the first line of "For he's a jolly good fellow," (substituting "she" of course); but the Pelham-Hews, turning crimson in an agony of hurt refinement, begged her to desist.

The gate clicked behind the spinsterical *cortège;* and five o'clock rang from the tower.

Rosamond went indoors and set out the plates for her supper.

By the slough, where the spinsters of Roseborough picnicked, the reeds and rushes were now silent and still, save where the light breeze passed; though there was a trail of freshly crushed and broken ones, where something heavier than the breeze had made its way through. One individual besides the toll-man saw the black-suited, black-whiskered stranger that afternoon. Johnson, the butcher's boy, encountered him in a lane almost directly behind the two neighbouring cottages where lived Mr. Horace Ruggle and Miss Jenny's mother, Mrs. Hackensee. Mrs. Hackensee occupied the front of her cottage and rented the two back rooms, overlooking the river, to Dr. Frei, the young musician who had come to Roseborough within the last few weeks. "DR. FREI, VIOLIN INSTRUCTOR" said the written placard on his door.

Johnson nursed an intense dislike for aliens; he "suspected 'em of plottin' agin the guver-mint." Dr. Frei was an alien, and Johnson told Mrs. Witherby's day maid, Hannah Ann, that he suspected the black-whiskered man of being in a plot with Dr. Frei to blow up the Roseborough gaol or the bell tower "or sump'n"; because, when he turned about

at the end of the lane for a second look, *the stranger had disappeared!* After he had left her, Hannah Ann was in a seriously overwrought condition; and so Mrs. Witherby found her when she returned from her drive. Such was Mrs. Witherby's own temperament, that it was not long before mistress and maid were in the same state of mind. Indeed, Mrs. Witherby was obliged to forego her customary glass of stout at dinner, because Hannah Ann refused to descend alone to the cellar for it and Mrs. Witherby would not allow her daughter Corinne to accompany her. Mabel Crewe, her niece, was not afraid, but she had turned sulky and bitter under her aunt's jibes on Wilton Howard's account. She revenged herself, therefore, by mocking at Mrs. Witherby's fears and by making her go without her ale.

CHAPTER XIII

ROSAMOND brought out the roast chicken again and made another meal of it with milk and bread and butter. His Friggets would have raised a great to-do if they had known how slimly their distinguished master's widow had lunched and dined during their absence. She cleared away her own few dishes quickly and put the contents of her larder on the dining-room table. It looked a very respectable collation when set off with the Mearely crockery and silver.

"I shan't lay the table," she decided, "because they never want to sit down at the same time. They can wander in and out as they like between games, and help themselves to plates and forks and so on."

Blake, who was gardener as well as coachman, except in the seeding season, had brought in fresh lettuce already before he had set out to Trenton; and, as His Friggets kept a supply of their very excellent mayonnaise always on hand, the big bowl of chicken salad was soon made. She took another peep at Dom Paradis's cake, and felt a just pride in its smooth, snow-white beauty.

"If I can't stand Villa Rose, in the end I can al-

ways go and be somebody's cake-maker." She consoled herself with this thought as she ran upstairs to dress herself in one of the costliest gowns in her wardrobe.

This was the rose-and-silver garment taken from the chest in the morning and hung upon the Louis chair under linen covers. She disposed the lilac-bud silk in the carved mahogany closet, against the morrow. As she exchanged her embroidery petticoat for one of organdie and Valenciennes, it did not occur to her to ask herself how she would like to have to dress in future on a cake-maker's wages. Her rapid fingers, removing hair pins, let down the massy bright waves of her hair which separated into ringlets just above her waist. It was not a pure yellow gold, that thick waving fall of hair; it was mingled with light brown and reddish tints, which made the whole, when pyramided in curls on her small head, as vital, brilliant, alluring, and indefinable as the inner nature of its owner. It was hair that in its variety of shades was truly indicative of milady's mercurial spirit; for even her occasional sobriety of mood resembled the sober brown strands that twisted in with the auburn and gold threads; it was a sobriety inclined to curl. Her own complaint about her hair was that it never look combed. Five minutes after she had demurely parted it in the centre the parting would disappear and the glistening waves,

mocking the damp brush's authority, would rise and undulate and interlace again at their pleasure.

She was in a hurry this evening and so let her curls please themselves, looping the ends through an antique circular Spanish comb of pale gold and seed pearls. She shook the dress out lovingly. She had never worn it.

Slowly, so that none of the small raptures of sliding silk should be missed, she let it descend, enveloping her, carefully keeping it from touching her hair, till it skirted her ankles evenly and her face looked over the top and flushed with pleasure to see itself so framed.

The material was a stiff silk of a quality too old for her if the colour and make of the gown had been different; but the rich shade, that was a rose-old-rose—neither so placid as old rose nor so positive as pink—and the semi-pompadour fashion combined with the weave (which would "stand by itself") made her look quaint. She was neither of one period nor another, nor was her gown old or young. The picture presented was radiant young womanhood of all time in its perfection. The gown had a partial overdress of dull silver gossamer, finished in a broad silver lace, in which the vine figure was worked in a brighter silver, toned again by gray-green leaves in the clusters. The short sleeves were of the gossamer over rose net, fitted sheerly and smoothly

to the arm. A cuff of the lace turned back from the elbow. A gossamer and lace collar stood up from the back of the bodice, which was cut in a narrow low square in front. There were touches of rose in the pattern of the lace of the collar; reversely, the narrow, smooth, stiff, rose girdle had silver eyelet holes and a hint of the vine tracery. Rose stockings and silver shoes, with buckles made of clusters of tiny roses, completed her costume.

She surveyed herself for some time with a delight that needed no formulated thought to express it. When she could endure parting with the vision the Orleans mirror gave her, she tossed a white wrap over her and went downstairs. Presently she giggled.

"Oh, wouldn't the Pelham-Hews and Palametta and The Kilties" (her name for the MacMillans) "rave if I were to go to Mr. Falcon's breakfast in this glorious thing! They needn't worry. I shall be a dowd to-morrow. But to-night! The shock may kill Mrs. Witherby—and incite Mr. Andrews and the Judge—but I'll end my Wonderful Day in splendour, even if it must be *lonely* splendour." Whatever rashness her gown proclaimed, she would refuse censure for it; it was her right to dare all things on her Wonderful Day, which could not be said to have passed until midnight struck.

The six o'clock bell, the last one to toll for the day, had rung ere she left the mirror.

The fall of gold light through the clear air of the valley, with the western sky giving just a hint of sunset and the river shining like molten glass, wooed her to the garden again. Some of the little annuals had already closed their eyes for the night. The insects and birds were on homeward flight. She went on, to the incline where the orchard began. From a point, here, she could look down at the gleaming river with the picture framed in arching boughs. She found something mystical in this view and loved it above all others, especially at this hour, when the last yellow rays fell like a slanting mist and the shadowed spaces under the huge apple trees were cool and dark.

She stood there for some time in deep, calm enjoyment. It came to her then, as it had done before on such evenings, that the few small-minded inhabitants, with their petty jealousies, were less than the gravel on the hillroad that rattled to the passing wheel. There was indeed a spirit of Roseborough, but the communal spirit was only a poor counterfeit of it. Professor Lee and his wife had found that pure and perfect spirit and translated it into human life. It was here for her also to find and make her own. It grew out of Roseborough's earth with its abundant flowers and trees. It was in its clear air, with the radiance of its light and of the wings that darted and floated and bathed themselves in

"Regarding each other and yielding to the charm of the sunset and the music, they did not observe a black-whiskered man who was crawling through the orchard"

it. The river bore it upon its waters, and the moving reeds sang of it by night and day. When the valley and hills slept, that spirit soared to the domain of the moon and the stars and kept watch with them.

"I couldn't be happy anywhere else," Rosamond said to herself. "There is something about this valley that is a part of me. But it is hard to live here, so close to earth, without love. Roseborough was made for love. That is what ails us all—Palametta, and The Kilties and the Pelham-Hews and—and—Rosamond Mearely! Well, I hope the old bald thing will marry Anabeth and then she'll stop that crying every time a man is mentioned."

The change to humour was only momentary, for the spell of Roseborough at this hour was too profound to be put off with lightness. Rosamond yielded to it, because she must. That mood was hers which only Nature, or a pure art, can give—a yearning that blended peace and sadness, and which made rich by what it withheld—a desire that was a deeper happiness than completion could be.

Into her silent reverie strains of music crept. Soft, thin, but mellow under a lover's touch, they came from the muted strings of a violin. The player was coming nearer, and from the upper end of the orchard. It was no surprise to her now to find Dr. Frei using her orchard as his concert hall. Dr. Frei had tested Roseborough's communal

spirit from the first day of his arrival; for he chose to consider that all Roseborough shared with him whatever it possessed—gladly, lovingly. Roseborough, taken off guard by the quixotic confidence reposed in her, had responded in kind. Instead of looking the stranger over through her lorgnettes *ad lib.*, she had returned his instant greeting and opened her heart to him with a warmth that amazed herself, though the recipient of her favour appeared to see nothing unusual in it.

"I wonder if he has been playing to Mrs. Lee?" was Rosamond's mental query.

In playing to Mrs. Lee, Dr. Frei had first introduced himself to Roseborough. One bright spring morning, hearing strange, delectable sounds, Mrs. Lee had hastened into her tiny garden and—found a young man sitting by the well playing a violin. A Trenton carter sat on his wagon beyond the gate, eating his way through a loaf of bread. The cart was piled high with small luggage. The violinist had risen, at sight of her, bowed profoundly, kissed her hand with emotion, explained himself as a concert violinist whose health had failed under the strain of public appearance, and begged leave to live in her cottage. This she finally convinced him, to his great annoyance, was not to be.

"But I honour you when I say I wish to live in your home!" he had exclaimed, autocratically. "It

is not to be argued. I have decided." He pointed to the carter and the portmanteaux.

He was not insane, she had become comfortably assured of that, though he was undeniably eccentric. In the end she had sent him with a note to Mrs. Hackensee, asking that he be cared for as a dear young stranger who had brought to Roseborough, not only his great talent, but also his beautiful faith in human goodness.

From that moment Dr. Frei had waited for no introductions or invitations. If a Roseborough door stood open, he entered it; and told those within that he was rejoiced to be among them. If the inmates were breakfasting, lunching, or supping, he pulled a chair up to the table and waited to be served as naturally as if he were a member of the family.

"Would you believe that this is the one spot on earth where I could do this?" he would say. "Yet it is so. It is your spirit. It is Roseborough. Roseborough restores my soul."

Violin in hand, he had walked in upon their mother and the seven Pelham-Hews at eight o'clock one morning in house-cleaning time. Some of the septet were on ladders and on chairs with mops and with dusters, rubbing the paper down or cleaning the pictures; and others were beating cushions or mattresses and generally translating the word

home into horror. Thinking that nothing but financial ruin or a death from infectious disease could make such an upheaval necessary, and eager to offer the only consolation in his power—a tender, wordless sympathy—he had seated himself on a rolled mattress and played to them for two hours without cessation; then, with tender looks, taken his departure.

"I, too, have the spirit. I, too, belong to Roseborough," was all that he said, as he waved them a majestic farewell from the door. Thinking him mad, not a Pelham-Hew had dared to move or speak during the recital. Anabeth, whose foot had gone to sleep, fell off the ladder as soon as he had gone and struck her funny-bone, the accident resulting in severe hysterics.

He had made himself equally free of the house and grounds of Villa Rose. Though, before others, his manner to the Villa's lady was formal, he expressed, in private, the intimate affection of a brother. Her widowhood appealed to his chivalry; and her black ribbons, he said, put out the sun for him; how had the anomaly of grief entered Roseborough and how had it attached itself to *her?*

"In me you have always a brother, a friend, a protector," he would say. "What privilege of manhood is more to be envied than the right to shelter women?"

She saw him now, and perceived that he had already seen her and was playing to her—the minuet she loved. He came slowly down the path, his dark eyes fixed on her, a smile about the lips that were too finely and sensitively formed for a man's mouth.

Regarding each other and yielding to the charm of the sunset and the music, they did not observe a black-whiskered man who was crawling through the orchard and hiding from time to time behind the broad tree trunks. He was observing them, however, minutely.

Frei paused beside her. They did not speak until the exquisite melody was ended. He took her hand and kissed it.

"Rosamond." It was his habit to address her so, because—so he said—the sound of her name was like music.

"Your music supplies the only thing that this wonderful scene lacked," she said—"melody!"

"You are moved. How beautiful your eyes and lips are when feeling stirs you! I have often remarked it. It is like a wind in the rose garden to-night, because you are a rose. I can see rose petals under that white cloud. Remove your cloak."

She slipped it off and hung it on the gate. Not until she had done so, did it occur to her that she had obeyed a command, given with an authority

which was inborn and unconscious that such a thing as opposition existed in the human breast.

"If I could compose a melody noble, tender, wistful. . . . Ah! I lack the words to describe it! But if I could compose it I would call it 'Rosamond.'"

"And dedicate it to me as if I were a royal highness."

He frowned.

"Not at all!" he asserted almost with violence. "I compose no masterpieces for royal highnesses. Royal highnesses are ugly and artificial. But you! Fair Rosamond, they tell me—Miss Watts, I think it was, told me last—that you were born on the farm. 'Farm product,' she called you. Your mother. . ."

"Made and sold butter! I am sure all Roseborough has informed you of that!"

"Ah, yes!" eagerly. "Almost every lady here—knowing by intuition how I would regard it—has told me this. And to each I have expressed my delight. Butter! how fragrant—how mellow! It is for you the perfect origin. Clover and hay and the sweet things of earth! Butter! It enraptures me to think your childish hands played in the churn with what Nature alone had produced." He caught her hands and kissed them fervently.

"So that is how you think of it?" she smiled.

"Hush; I wish to play you the little Tschaikowsky."

He leaned his head over the instrument again and began to play. Watching him, she noted the whitening temple-locks against the coal black of his hair where it had not turned, and the lines in his thin, dark-skinned face, and wondered what sorrow had written these marks of age upon so young a man.

"I am thirty-five," he had once said to her. "I tell you only what all the world knows." This last was a pet phrase of his in relating details about himself. She understood by it that, in some brilliant circle far from Roseborough, he had been a concert artist of note.

When the little air was ended, she said:

"I have learned the accompaniment to that. We will play it this evening. You have heard from Mrs. Lee that I am having a few guests for an hour or so this evening."

"No! I have not heard. I went just now to play for Mrs. Lee, whom I love with a reverent affection. But I saw through the windows that she had a woman there, and oh, such a running hither and thither with towels and candles and so forth! So I stole silently away. I will come, dear Rosamond, and we will play. But now I must go home to Mütterlein Hackensee, who will have made a simple but perfect meal for me. She will be so distressed that I am not there to eat it fresh from her hands."

"I see Mr. Andrews coming over the top of the hill. If you wait a moment you will just catch him below the wall here, and he will drive you home."

"Ah! So? That is excellent. Rosamond, today, an hour ago, perhaps, I made a wonderful discovery. I felt like some poor simple-minded peasant who finds a sacred relic. I, also, wished to kneel, in awe and joy, before a holy thing which I could not understand because my mind could not grasp it. You are my dear sister and my spiritual kin, and to you I will tell what I found."

"What? Tell me," she said gently.

"I discovered that I am Richard Frei—a man, like any other man; and that I may love and marry —like any man. The amazement of it has overwhelmed me."

The rapt intensity in his eyes forbade her to smile. With a spontaneous movement of sympathy she slipped her hand into his arm.

"But why does that amaze you? The right to love is given to every man—to all the world. It has always been so."

He looked at her in silence for a few moments; a sensitive quiver passed over his face and his eyes filled.

"It is true," he said at last, slowly. "It is true—that strange, wonderful thing you have said there. It *is* given to every man to love one woman and to

be loved by her. Oh, marvellous! I can no longer believe that once I saw men who had not known the feeling of gratitude."

She pressed his arm kindly, but did not try to speak.

Mr. Andrews' cart wheels sounded near by. Rosamond withdrew her hand then, and smilingly reminded him:

"You'll have to run to catch him. His nag always canters down hill It has cast-iron knees."

"Adieu. Till to-night." He ran through the slanting orchard toward the wall, calling back to her twice:

"To-night," and, "later, I come."

She watched him disappear among the trees, and presently heard the cart stop, then go on again.

The last russet gold of sunset and the gray and purple of oncoming twilight mingled over the gleaming river. One star shone high above Villa Rose.

"It is night now," she thought, as she looked at the star. "My Wonderful Day is ended. And *he* never came to say, 'Good-morning, Rosamond!'"

Turning, she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Lee's dove-gray dress. She went up the path to meet her. Together they walked across the garden and into Villa Rose.

The black-whiskered man, stooping among the shadows, stole to the gate and watched Rosamond

until she disappeared. Then he disposed himself comfortably on the grass under a pear tree and covered his face with his hat. Anon his heavy breathing and zizz-z-zing told the rival locusts and crickets that he slept.

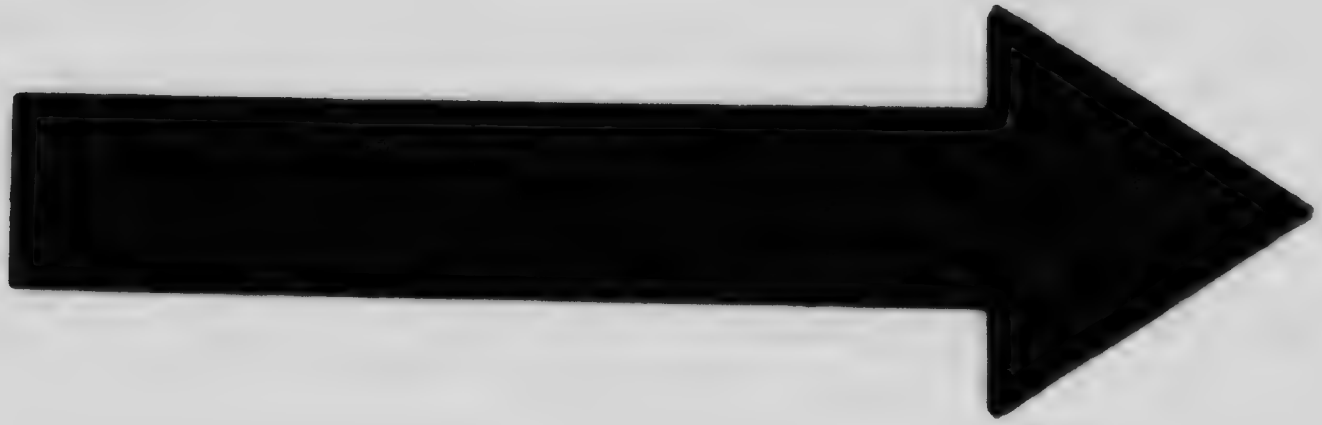
CHAPTER XIV

INDUSTRIOUS lady! You have brought fancy work of some kind!" Rosamond pointed to the little crocheted bag hanging from the older woman's wrist.

"Oh, no. Just a bit of lace I'm mending. What an exquisite twilight. It seems a pity to turn on artificial light. Your lighting scheme is very beautiful; but, nevertheless, I've always wondered that Mr. Mearely did not keep to candles. They seem more harmonious with his antiques. Electricity is so modern."

"Mr. Mearely thought that electric light was a great protection. He used to say that a burglar might come into the house, and clear out with the most priceless of his antiques, while he himself was hunting for the intruder with a candle, and that a draught, or even the burglar himself, might blow out the candle; but that, with electric light, one need only turn a button and the guilty party would be discovered and confounded. It was his theory that a sudden blaze of light always frightens wrongdoers."

Mrs. Lee was composing herself on the large settee



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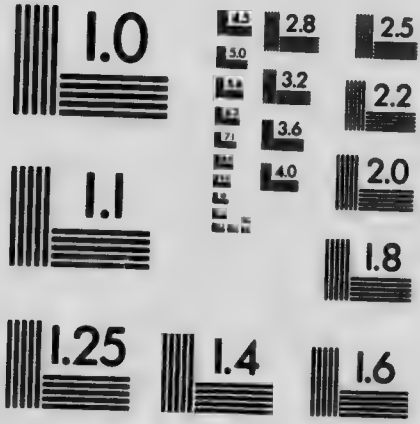

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near the fireplace. She exchanged her ordinary glasses for her "fine work" spectacles and, setting thimble, scissors, and thread on the little table at the end of the settee, she drew out of the bag a small, circular frame holding the kerchief she was darning.

"Personally, I think he really wanted his art objects properly lit up at night, so that he could sit in his swivel chair and look at them all in turn." Rosamond turned on the last of the little, separate lamps. Then she opened a drawer in her inlaid desk at the back of the room, near the door to the music room, and took out a pack of cards.

"I think this is the pack they had last. Mrs. Witherby is very hard on cards—especially when she is losing. She tears the edges with her teeth."

"An intense nature, poor dear woman. Her married life, though otherwise ideal, I fear was stormy. She was wildly jealous, poor soul; without cause, I'm sure. I know Mr. Witherby came to my husband for advice about it. 'Tell me, for heaven's sake, what to do with Emma,' he said. He was distracted."

Rosamond giggled.

"He should have asked Blake. Blake has very practical ideas."

"Has he? I can hear you laughing, so I know you're at some mischief. But I will say, never-

theless, that I believe humble peasant folk, like Blake and his kind, have many simple, natural ideas that would benefit all of us. Peasant unions are frequently happier than the marriages of intellectuals. For all your laughing, I dare say Blake could have given Mr. Witherby good advice."

Rosamond giggled again.

"He could! excellent advice! 'Hemma ud a-ben a different 'ooman if Timothy Blake had 'ad 'er,'" she concluded, in fair mimicry of the disciplinarian's dialect.

"My dear husband told him there was nothing he could do with Emma, but let time and patience prove her own folly to her. The poor man did not live long, and I dare say she has often regretted her tantrums. I'm afraid a good many married couples do have these times with each other. The only things I ever scolded Professor Lee for were giving so much money away, and being so unpunctual at meals; and that was only because these were both so bad for him. But though his generosity did bring us to very slender means and a tiny cottage, we had enough for our needs after all; and I wouldn't really have changed his nature, in this respect, if I could. It is something of a problem to be both liberal and cautious at the same time; and I confess the Lees never solved that problem." She laughed.

Rosamond, finding that a ten-spot was so torn that its identity could not be hidden from any player who had once held it, was seeking through the desk for another pack.

"Look, Mrs. Lee!" she called; "Look and tremble."

"Dear me, what is it?" Mrs. Lee turned and tried to peer across the room through her "fine work" spectacles. "It's all a blur to me."

"This!" Rosamond came over and stood beside her with something gleaming in her hand. "An engine of destruction."

"Good heavens, child! a revolver? I do hope it is not loaded." She drew back in trepidation from the shining toy with its mother-of-pearl handle. Rosamond laughed.

"It's a kind of revolver. It's a pistol. And it *is* loaded!"

"Dear, dear. What for? Are you afraid of marauders? Perhaps having all these valuable art objects in the house makes you nervous; but I am sure there is no need of pistols. Roseborough never has experiences of that sort."

"No," she laughed. "I'm not afraid. I remember I took it with me two weeks ago, when Wilton and I went riding with Miss Crewe and Corinne into the other valley beyond Charleroy. I wanted to prove to him that I could hit objects at a certain distance. And I did. Mr. Mearely taught me to

shoot and he said I had a straight eye. He was a crack shot himself, you know. I remember now that I put it in that drawer when we all came in for tea. Amanda made such a fuss about my keeping it upstairs. She seemed to think I would get up and commit suicide in my sleep. I wanted to teach the two girls to fire it, but they wouldn't learn, and they screamed every time I popped it off. So it wasn't a very successful shooting-party."

She returned to the desk and slipped the pistol back into its drawer.

"I think I'll put this new pack in an envelope and write on the outside 'Losers should not bite.' If I indulged in Mrs. Witherby's manners, she'd be the first to say that nothing else was to be expected from a farm urchin! But, in her, they are a sign of the aristocrat's fiery soul! Pooh!" She put the cards in the centre of the large table.

"It is incredible to me how any one so beautiful as you are to-night can be so naughty! I had almost said——" Mrs. Lee paused and looked with mock severity over her glasses.

"What?" with airy defiance.

"'Spiteful, was the word I *almost* said."

"I thought you did say it!" The unrepentant one tiptoed over and kissed her.

"Well, if I did, I might better have kept my breath to cool my porridge, as the country folk say. My

wise rebukes do not seem to benefit you in the least to-day."

"Well, you mustn't scold, for I baked Dom—I mean, Mr. Falcon's cake, and it is a marvel of flavoured architecture. It looks like a new Parthenon—with raisin and fig filling."

"Then no wonder you will not take reproof from me! And I suppose you would say I am an ungrateful old woman to attempt to scold you. Very well. You shall be as wicked as ever you please."

"And when I have set all Roseborough by the ears, you will come and straighten things out for me?"

"Oh, surely!" She smiled.

"Hark! The first carriage wheels. It will be the Wellses. They always arrive first because they have farthest to come." Rosamond ran to the verandah. "They are not very far ahead this evening, though; because Mrs. Witherby's barouche is just behind."

In a moment Mrs. Lee heard her exchanging good-evenings with the arrivals. Then Dr. Wells's deliberate but hearty voice greeted her from the steps.

"Ah! there is Mrs. Lee. Well! Well! What an honour! Though, as the one man in Roseborough who is responsible for the health of the community—even as our Mrs. Witherby is responsible for its morals *here*, and the vicar for its status *hereafter*, te-he-he—I ought to order you home to bed at once.

Anyone of your young years should be asleep at this hour, especially when you keep up the habit of rising at daybreak."

Dr. Wells seldom spoke without making a little oration. He was wont to say that he took his own time about everything because, the time being his own, he knew he had plenty of it, and no one else had the right to call him to account for his expenditure of it. That he frequently forced others to spend a great deal of *their* own time, in listening to him wind away from exordium to peroration, was a point he did not take into his consideration. He was a fine specimen of a fine type, namely the country doctor of the old school who was constantly to be seen in all weathers carrying hope and pills, human affection and gray powders, camomile and cheer, into anxious homes, and caring far less about his fee than about the patient's relief. He was short and stocky—a deep-chested, stout, sound, and roll-shaped body, every hard layer of fat-protected gristle daring weather and disease to come on and see what would happen to them. Nature had formed him to be a country physician; for country folk put their faith only in doctors who are never ill themselves. A doctor's health is a country superstition.

It is the sadder, therefore, to be obliged to relate that Dr. Wells—and his wife, also, for she was, in this temptation, even weaker morally than himself—

had become addicted to dyspepsia. There was not a thing the matter with their interior mechanisms, really, but some strain of notoriety-love had led him and his spouse to affect this delicacy of constitution in order to remind people perpetually that he was a cousin of Dr. Mayhew Pipp of London who had discovered a remedy for the burning aftermath of the sin of gluttony—a pellet that extinguished the fires of the inferno within. It must also be stated that this pose was losing for Dr. Wells some of that confidence in his immunity without which no medicine man can treat persons to their profit or his own—in the country.

He took off his light topcoat, hat, and thin, white silk scarf, [of the old school, he believed in bundling up for driving, at night, regardless of the weather,] and laid them on a bamboo seat on the verandah. His outer coverings removed, there emerged an apple-rosy, rotund face, with white hair, moustache, and whiskers about it, every hirsute atom crisp and electrical with health. The very man, one would say, to enter a sick room; for the patient would inevitably cry: "No matter what it is, give *me* the dose *you* take!"

"And where is Mrs. Wells?" Mrs. Lee inquired, as the doctor came down, leaving the ladies still unwinding their wraps, with Mrs. Mearely's aid.

"Ah! in bed. Yes, the dear soul. In bed. An-

other dyspeptic attack. But she insisted on my coming without her. She knows that whist is my weakness, and, being glad that I have no worse vices, she encourages it. It is most satisfactory, my dear lady, to indulge in vices approved of by one's wife." Smiling, he seated himself beside her.

"Well! There is our dear Mrs. Lee!" Mrs. Witherby sailed down upon her. "What a surprise! I had no idea we should find you here!"

What more she might have said, in this vein, was curbed by a supercilious glance from her niece, who bent to kiss Mrs. Lee's left cheek as soon as her aunt had completed her osculations on the other one. Mrs. Witherby knew that Mabel was in a dangerous humour; and she recalled that, at times, on far less provocation, Miss Crewe had succeeded in conveying to an assembly her doubts of her aunt's truthfulness. Avoiding danger, therefore, she drew away from the settee and seated herself at the table.

"Cards!" she cooed. "Isn't that delightful? And a new pack, too! How thoughtful of you, dear Mrs. Mearely, to get us a new pack. The others were really rather spoiled. Men are so rough in their handling of cards."

Mrs. Witherby was, like Dr. Wells, less an individual than a type. She was symbolic of efficiency, as the village understood the term. That is, never having been obliged to do anything herself to satisfy

others, she felt completely competent to give anyone directions about any task whatsoever. She knew how *she* wanted things done, and had a rooted conviction that she was the only person in the community whose pleasure or approval mattered in the least. She was rather overwhelming in appearance, being of more than medium height, and decidedly more than medium breadth. Furthermore, she wore both those anatomical protuberances cited by the ancient Hebraic scribes as perilous next-door neighbours for a humble and a contrite heart—namely, the proud bosom and the high stomach.

Her two chins reposed between the upper folds of her fichu, for she held her head haughtily with chins in, brow high, eyebrows elevated, eyes alert and ready to snap with indignation at the stupidity and impropriety constantly affronting them, and mouth slightly open, prepared to exclaim the scathing contempt surging within her for anyone and everyone whose views on any subject differed from Emma Crewe Witherby's.

Her hair was but slightly touched with gray and she was still doing all she could to conceal the blanched tendrils. She made an erection of her tresses, after the tongs had crimped every strand, till the formation suggested an overturned cornucopia; she then inset it with tortoiseshell pins. Her dress was a plum-coloured brocade with black velvet

train, and elbow sleeves of brocade. Her fichu and her sleeves were trimmed with Honiton lace. "A gentlewoman should adorn her station," was one of her favourite axioms. Three fourths of the money spent on dress in her household went to assist her in living up to the saying. The rest was sufficient to buy girlish muslins for Corinne, who was "too young for silks," being barely eighteen.

Mabel Crewe, who was twenty-five—and handsome, in a slim, dusky, reserved fashion (with sulphurous suggestions underneath it)—was provided for with her aunt's cast-offs, which her own clever fingers converted into passable, though not suitable, raiment for her comely young body. She was in black silk to-night. The long skirt hid the fact that her hose were not silk and that her slippers were rubbed in places. Her well-shaped white arms and slender throat were oddly set in Aunt Emma's old *peau de soie*, but perhaps whiter by contrast.

This last was Wilton Howard's opinion as his gaze sought and lingered on her. He had driven up so closely upon the other two vehicles that the sound of his wheels had not been heard. He stood on the verandah, divesting himself of his topcoat. Anticipation of the only happiness she knew—her few words and stolen moments with this man—made Mabel Crewe keener than the others to detect his noiseless presence. She turned and saw him,

this handsome, well-bred, shallow young gentleman, surveying her with admiration in his eyes and a frown between his brows. Perchance the frown meant that he was resentful of her power to stir him, since nothing could come of it but disappointment. In Roseborough, persons of his and Miss Crewe's birth and kindred could not marry on nothing but love. Their families, and Roseborough, demanded of them that they settle themselves properly in life, to keep up appearances.

Her eyes met his and a movement went through her, like the slightest swaying of a tree; but, after the first instant, her face revealed nothing. It was proud, indifferent—cold, one might almost have said, but for the undercurrents tingling through her and stirring the depths of her eyes.

"Good-evening, Mr. Howard," she called in her leisurely voice—a voice refined and musical in quality and indifferent in its inflections. She turned her back on him and moved to the settee where Dr. Wells and Mrs. Lee were still in conversation.

"Mr. Howard has arrived, and I am sure Judge Giffen and Mr. Andrews cannot be far off. Doctor, you will presently be rejoicing in beating Aunt Emma at cards. That is, if she is not your partner. If she *is* your partner, then you can rejoice in being beaten for her sake, with many stripes."

"I heard every word of that, Mabel," Mrs.

Witherby declared, with a little more asperity than usual. "You delight to undermine my intellect in the ears of my friends. As to cards, I frequently say, and without egotism, that there is not a woman in Roseborough who plays a better hand than I."

Corinne Witherby giggled at this.

"I heard the Judge say one evening that no doubt there is no woman in Roseborough who plays a *better* hand than some he has seen you hold, Mamma; and that he is positive no other woman in the world would play a *good* hand in the way he's seen you play some of yours."

"Corinne!"

"Oh, it's no use reproving me! If I am old enough to play cards with you, I'm old enough to criticise the way you play your hands."

"Corinne, be quiet. I am speaking to Mrs. Mearely. I fear I've spoiled you by making such a companion of you. You should be in the schoolroom."

"But, I'm not!" Corinne cried, merrily. She was thinking little of what she said; for her eyes, round as saucers, were devouring Rosamond in her rose-and-silver trappings.

"Isn't Mrs. Mearely too beautiful for words tonight?" she whispered into her cousin's ear.

"Who is she to have everything? Any one could be beautiful in such a frock," was the bitter reply.

Corinne's arm went round Mabel's slim waist. She whispered again:

"You look beautiful, too—even if your dress is plainer than hers. When I am twenty-one, and mamma gives me some of the handsome things out of the big box, I'm going to divide everything half and half with you."

"Oh, Corinne!" she smiled. "Perhaps, when you're twenty-one, you won't want to divide."

"I'll want to, more! Because I'll be three and a half years fonder of you than I am now."

Seeing Mr. Howard manœuvring his greetings so that he could conclude them naturally at Mabel's side, Corinne withdrew. She was a pretty little creature, plump, rosy, and lively. Her white muslin frock, the work of her cousin's clever fingers, set off her black, curly hair and big, bright brown eyes. Mrs. Taite could never have cast her doubts upon Corinne in her muslins, for the guileless heart made itself evident in all her words and acts. One surmised—from her buoyancy and sweetness of temper, and a native thoughtfulness she had for the sensibilities of others—that her father, the late Jameson Witherby, Esquire, had taken a good disposition away from earth with him when he had quitted the side of his Emma—until that day when an overworked Providence (meaning only to be systematic, not unkind) should re-unite them for all eternity.

"Mrs. Mearely, do come aside a moment. I must ask you something." Mrs. Witherby took Rosamond firmly by the arm.

"It is my dress she is after!" Rosamond thought. "Ask; I'm all attention," she said.

"Your gown. Do tell me now, have you put off *all*—even the smallest hint—of mourning? . . . *Permanently?*" She added the last word with heavy emphasis.

"Yes. Even to the last, smallest hint. Permanently."

"Indeed? Indeed?"

"Yes. Indeed and indeed!"

"Of course, I felt sure you would not resent *my* questions. Though if any one else asked you, you might ask, in return, what business it was of theirs. And I, for one, should back you up in that; for, if there is one thing above another which I neither can nor will tolerate, it is inquisitiveness. Why pry into the affairs of others? Whose business is it but their own? That is what I say. All Roseborough knows what I think about busybodying and gossip."

"Yes; that is very true. All Roseborough knows. . . . By the way, Roseborough has behaved beautifully to my mourning, never resenting that it shadowed the pleasure of teas and little gatherings, when—er—joy should have been unconfined. I am showing Roseborough how well I understand it, and how grateful I am for its forbearance, by

returning to colours—the brightest and cheeriest I can select." She beamed sweetly.

"Oh!—oh-h? Really?" Mrs. Witherby felt her sails slacken as the wind was taken out of them.

"To-morrow, at Mrs. Lee's breakfast, I shall wear white—a very simple frock. But to-night I have put this one on, to introduce myself in my new character—first, to you and Mrs. Lee and our closest intimates. You can understand how I would naturally do so?" She smiled again, more sweetly.

"Oh, yes. Oh-h, ye-es! I understand it perfectly. Oh, *perfectly!* Are you sure, my dear Mrs. Mearely, that you do not intend to make a little announcement ere we leave to-night?"

"An announcement?"

"Judge Giffen is to be here—ah, he *is* here! I didn't see him come in. It is very sweet of you to say that you have dressed yourself so charmingly, to-night, to give pleasure to *my* eyes, but are you sure—are you *sure*" (she wagged a forefinger playfully) "that you didn't put on that ineffable gown to charm a *lover?*"

In spite of herself, Rosamond's eyes snapped and the red flamed in her cheeks.

"Not only sure, but certain and positive," she said tartly.

Mrs. Witherby, much pleased to see the flush and discomposure, smiled, bridled, and said:

"Well, we shall see what we shall see! and I feel confident we shall know a great deal more about our dear Mrs. Mearely to-morrow. The sweet blush is *most* becoming."

Knowing that she had the worst of the encounter and could not easily recover, Rosamond was glad to be obliged to give her attention to the Judge. She showed a proper solicitude regarding his misadventures on horseback and made gracious response to his compliments.

Presently Mr. Andrews and Dr. Frei arrived. The latter, violin-case in hand, loitered by Miss Crewe and Wilton Howard, who had seated themselves on the verandah to observe the young moon rise over the river, defiant of the wrath their *tête-à-têtes* always aroused in Mrs. Witherby's breast. While it could be said of even the stocky doctor that he wore evening dress naturally, and looked as if the coat—which classifies all who wear it as either gentlemen or waiters—*belonged* to him, yet it must be admitted that Dr. Frei brought a greater distinction to the garment than did any other man in Roseborough.

Rosamond thought he carried his head like some *mæstro* receiving the homage of an enraptured public. As to features, he was less handsome than Howard, and he lacked the smooth and respectfully caressing manner which was the latter's greatest charm to

women; but there was "an elegance about him"—as all Roseborough echoed Mrs. Witherby in saying—that set him apart. Even Mrs. Witherby was baffled by his manner. It stopped her questions before they were completed, making her change their tenor and give them the semblance of innocent and uninquisitive remarks.

Mr. Albert Andrews stood back surveying his hostess with a stare more pop-eyed than usual. He knew *pink* when he saw it; and he was seeing pink. The silver overdress, however, raised a row of interrogation points across the blank spaces of his mind. Mrs. Bunny had not shown him silver's place in the emotional scale. He was a cautious, sensitive soul, and desired to avoid making himself ridiculous a second time. He looked about for aid and anon decided that Dr. Wells, whose profession brought him into intimate relations with death, was the man who should know whether a silver overdress was a condition of mourning or not. He drew him aside and asked the important question.

"Silver? Silver? God bless my soul, man, I don't know. One sees a good deal of it about."

"I think I recall seeing silver wreaths on caskets?" Mr. Andrews ruminated with questioning inflection.

"No doubt. No doubt. And on wedding cakes, too! Many a man wishes the wreath that topped his wedding cake had adorned his casket instead."

Dr. Wells was not interested in the subject, so he chuckled at his own joke, gave Andrews a dig in the ribs, and made off to the whist table, mentally resolving to have Corinne instead of her mother for his partner. In this he was disappointed. Andrews had already asked Corinne to play with him. He was practising gallantry, as well as colour selection, to fit himself for the *rôle* he wished to enact as the master of the mistress of Villa Rose.

"I am eager to try the Tschaikowsky with you," Frei said to Rosamond, taking his violin from its case. "May we not play now?"

"Yes, certainly. We shall not be missed."

She looked about at her guests and saw that they were all apparently in contentment. Dr. Wells was dealing the cards, and the four at the table were engrossed already with the pleasure to come. Howard and Mabel, chatting in low tones on the verandah, had forgotten all the world but each other. Mrs. Lee was absorbed in a difficult moment of her lace-mending. The Judge had seated himself at the other end of the long settee and descended into the profundities of the latest *Digest*.

Rosamond, lifting herself on tiptoe, put one finger on her laughing lips and the other hand into Frei's.

"Come," she whispered.

Smiling delightedly at her prankishness, he clasped her fingers and tiptoed with her into the music room.

CHAPTER XV

THE musicians were not missed, and it is safe to say that, for some time, their melody was unheard; not even the lovers on the verandah lent ear to it, for Mabel was gathering her forces for an attack upon all the conventions of maidenly reserve, while Howard was seeking through the shallows of his diplomacy for some acceptable method of writing "finis" across their romance. Each felt the secret strain and battle within the other. They became silent, each waiting and guarding against the other's first move.

At the card table, as usual, the first rounds were played in silence. The players were, as the saying is, "feeling one another out." Judge Giffen was not distracted, therefore, from the opening columns which the *Digest* had allotted to an "exclusive" bit of information supplied by the young gentleman who acted as its special correspondent on the Balkan peninsula. There was a page and a half of it. The Judge took off his glasses—rubbed, and was replacing them, when Mrs. Lee addressed him.

"I do hope you will find some charming item to regale us with, Judge Giffen. I saw you tear off the wrapper so I know it is a new *Digest*."

"Ah, yes—ah—just come, you know. A remarkable paper, the *Digest*. Gives one the—ah—news of the world every week without a superfluous word—ah—journalism in these days has become—ah—debauched. The simplest events are distorted for sensationalism—ah—to wring tears from the sentimentalists."

"I've heard others say the same thing. What a pity, is it not?"

Mrs. Lee, finding that she could not turn a corner successfully, took the kerchief out of the frame and drew the point of lace taut over her thumb. Her motion attracted the judge's attention and he watched her deft fingers as he continued his strictures on journalism.

"A pity? A scandal! Does a celebrity die? We are intruded into the most intimate details of his family history; what—ah—shaving soap he used and whether he—ah—preferred to kiss his lady love on the —ah—nose or behind the ear; and—ah—who cried, and how many, when he—ah—in vulgar phrase—ah—'kicked the bucket.' And, mind you, not a word of truth in the whole story! Whereas the *Digest* merely states with terseness and accuracy: 'the—ah—Emperor of China died on Sunday, of—ah—an overdose of—ah—bird's-nest soup.' It leaves you to infer that, in the case of the death of a celebrated personage who met thousands of people in

his public life, there were some who cried and some who—ah—did not. Any fool knows that, so why waste print on it?"

"My husband used to tell his students that, in literary composition, sincerity was more important than rhetoric and that only a fine *feeling* could dictate the making of a truly fine *phrase*. He said that pure English had come with the spiritual development of the race; and that a forceful and intimate use of it must come about through the individual writer's spiritual evolution. Otherwise he claimed no man could write with real power."

"Ah. Um, very true. But all wasted on the—ah—young cubs, I dare say." The Judge wisely made no attempt to follow Professor Lee's analyses. Metaphysics was several points beyond him. He found the movements of Mrs. Lee's tiny needle, with its almost imperceptible gossamer thread, more interesting.

"Ah. I have become quite absorbed in your work. It seems to be so—ah—marvellously intricate. May I ask what, precisely, you are doing?"

"I am mending a rare old cobweb of lace," she answered—spreading the white fragment across her palm for him to look at—"and, at the same time, transferring it from its worn-out cambric to a new piece of linen. A very delicate operation, judge; and a labour of love."

"Ah! indeed?"

"Yes. It is for my granddaughter's trousseau. She marries in December, and—we feel confident—very happily. Yes, her intended seems a thoroughly settled young man. She met him in Scotland."

"It is a labour requiring both patience and skill, I should say."

"I think that patience and skill are the two qualities required most in any labour of love," she answered, with gentle pleasure in the subject. He peered at the dainty fabric as she cleverly set it into the frame again.

"Now do find us some delicious item," she urged.

"Ah. To be sure. Here's something on the first page. I've just begun—and it—ah—promises to be exciting, too, which is—ah—rather unusual for the *Digest*."

He had just found the place, preparatory to reading, when hubbub burst about the card-table.

"Now, Mamma!" Corinne's vigorous young voice broke in. "You simply *cannot* lead every time I take a trick. It's—it's ridiculous. This is my play."

"If the Witherbys are going to have a set to, there'll be no use in my reading aloud till they've fought it out," the Judge said to himself, and lost himself as promptly as possible in the "exclusive."

"Corinne! You are speaking to your mother!"

Mrs. Witherby so informed her daughter, when she could get her breath. Dr. Wells hastened to intervene.

"I think," he said, "that on the whole it might be as well to play in turn. Of course, I make no rule"—a deprecating gesture toward his bristling partner forbade her to think he would presume to make rules for her—"but it is generally done, I believe." He rose, beamed benignly. "Your card." He passed it to her.

Corinne tossed her head at her mother and led the round.

When her turn came, Mrs. Witherby threw down the knave of hearts and gathered up the cards.

"Trumps! Our trick, doctor," she cried victoriously. Her success was greeted with a profound silence, broken at last by Dr. Wells; he coughed. Andrews, seeing that Corinne was about to express herself with her customary frankness, flung himself into the breach.

"Er—you overlooked—oh, quite by accident, of course—er—you have the three of clubs in your hand."

"I refuse to play with any one—*any one*—who is capable of looking at my hand."

The sensitive Mr. Andrews turned the peony-red which is specially inflicted upon sandy, blond men.

"I did not look at your hand," he protested, with

mild heat. "You played the three of clubs when you led off, just now, in your daughter's place—oh, by mistake, of course. It is still in your hand."

"Your card," the doctor murmured, politely handing it to her. Corinne gathered up the trick.

"Another round finishes the game. Come on, Mrs. Witherby. You must put your best foot forward and cast these young people into the shade," Dr. Wells urged in his cheeriest tones, obviously endeavouring to banish the sour gloom that had settled on his partner's spirit. A darting, knifelike glance of her eyes told that he had failed.

"My foot is not of such dimensions as to cast a shade over two persons," sourly. "I don't understand your allusion."

Again the peace-loving Andrews flew like the dove upon the storm.

"Of course, Mrs. Witherby, you will be one of Mrs. Lee's breakfast party to-morrow?" he said, and thus gave Mrs. Lee the opportunity she needed. She had begun to wonder how she was to introduce her topic sympathetically in the discordant atmosphere of one of Mrs. Witherby's "card-game humours."

"Did I hear my name?" she asked, turning to them.

"I mentioned your breakfast party," Andrews replied quickly. "It is to be at eleven o'clock, is it not?"

"Yes. But everyone is to be there by a quarter to eleven, so that we can be prompt in beginning."

"To be sure. Ah. The breakfast party." The Judge looked over his paper.

"Do tell us about it," Mrs. Witherby interjected. "I am simply bored with these c[illegible]s."

"Mr. Falcon will arrive at Trenton Waters on the morning train, and I am sure he will prefer to ramble across the fields to Roseborough. I suppose I am a little old-fashioned, but I wished him to feel that all the town was welcoming him home—not only the widow of his old professor." She sighed and smiled.

"*Dear* Mrs. Lee," Mrs. Witherby exclaimed, effusively. "That is *so* like you."

Encouraged by this responsiveness, Mrs. Lee continued more hopefully:

"You see, there was a good deal of comment when Jack left college so abruptly. There had just come the opportunity, through Professor Lee, to teach languages—for which Jack had a rare gift—and certain classes in literature also. That was quite an honour for a young man of twenty-one. And to think he threw it all away just to go out into the world and see what was to be seen!"

"Well, well," Mr. Andrews said, as she paused; "I'd never have done that. But, then, it isn't my nature."

"Roseborough was inclined to be indignant,"

Mrs. Lee admitted. "But my husband felt—and said openly—that there might be wisdom in his wandering. Indeed he was the only one who stood the boy's friend in the matter. Sixteen years ago. Ah, me!" She bent over her lace, because her eyes were wet.

The Judge looked over the edge of his paper again.

"I can't place him. Falcon, do you say?"

"Yes, Jack Falcon."

He shook his head.

"I don't think I ever knew him."

Dr. Wells had just dealt for a new game, but he lingered in picking up his cards to say:

"Doubtless I treated him for measles, in his turn—along with every other child in the district—but I have not a clear remembrance of him as a young man. Was he on any of the athletic teams, do you remember?"

"Oh, he was past the measles stage when he came to Roseborough! He would trudge for miles through the woods; but I remember that he hated sports."

"That accounts for my very hazy recollection of him. I was never called from my Thanksgiving turkey to set his collarbone."

He laughed cosily at his own repartee, and played, since Mrs. Witherby had opened the game and his turn had come. His ruddy brow was rolled up in furrows, though, because it was difficult to follow

his partner's play at any time—more than difficult while conversing upon an alien subject.

"The boy wasn't one to—to 'mix,' as they say. He was devoted to my dear husband. Professor Lee had a wonderful understanding of all growing things—he loved them. Ah, well," she sighed tenderly. "Jack was much with us. He had his room here—the music room it is now—for of course he knew us in our palmy days when we lived here, before Mr. Mearely's time. We loved him dearly and he never forgot us. He always wrote to my husband at least twice a year, and—afterward—to me. When I decided to publish the professor's manuscripts, the boy wrote—he was in the Balkans then—offering his services as editor, out of gratitude and love for him who is gone. So you see why my heart is very tender toward him, and why I am asking you all, dear friends, to join me to-morrow in his welcome home."

"Oh, Mrs. Lee," Corinne cried, clapping her hands, "I think it's lovely!"

"Such a sweet notion!" her mother opined, and to show that her interest was genuine, asked, with point: "Has he made any *money?*"

"Ah, I fancy he has," Mrs. Lee said. "A little; though for years his was a hand-to-mouth existence. Recently, I know, he was handsomely paid by a wealthy gentleman of title . . ."

"Title?" Mrs. Witherby interrupted excitably.

"Yes, indeed—if my failing memory serves me—I believe he was almost if not quite a *royal* personage."

"*Royal ?*"

"But that reminds me of something that will stir your pride, I know, as it stirred mine. There was a little prose poem of Professor Lee's, *about Roseborough.*" She beamed at them all.

"Quite a good subject for a poem, I dare say," the Judge remarked. "Personally, I never read a poem—though even the *Digest* prints them, to fill in."

"I sent it to Jack," Mrs. Lee hastened on—to forestall any discussion, pro and con poetry—"hoping that it might revivify his memories and lead him home from his wanderings. He showed it to this titled gentleman, who was so charmed with it that he begged for a copy and asked many question, about our dear old town."

There were pleased and reverent murmurs from every one, and Howard, who had also been listening, said:

"Very flattering."

Miss Crewe kept her shoulder turned, and refused to let her thoughts leave their main purpose to sympathize with her natal hamlet's pride.

"It begins so beautifully," Mrs. Lee continued.

"Listen: 'Here where all hearts are tender and sincere.'"

"'Here where all hearts are tender and sincere," Mrs. Witherby echoed, rolling her eyes. "How lovely! One would know at once that meant Roseborough."

The phrase had caught Andrews's ear. In playing, he parroted vacantly:

"'Here where all hearts are tender and sincere!' Very nice. Trumps."

Mrs. Witherby returned to the item of greatest interest to her.

"But, dear Mrs. Lee, you spoke just now of his being handsomely paid for something. What was he paid for, and how much was it?"

"Oh, yes. For designing a great pleasure garden for the peasants of that place. But I don't know the amount."

"Oh, he is a landscape gardener now?" Andrews asked. He was an amateur horticulturist, in a very small way, himself, and enjoyed gardening details. The judge, whose interest in Mr. Falcon was exhausted, had returned to his paper. Mrs. Lee laughed.

"No. Not a gardener. He is a writer. But one who can write on the earth, if pencil and pad fail him. A practical poet—if you can call 'practical' a man who roams the world in search of beauty, or of conditions which will allow him to *make* them

beautiful. The professor delighted in saying—oh, figuratively, of course—that one could easily recognize the true artist, because his fingers are always knuckle-deep in earth-dust; whereas the dilettante's fingers are chiefly remarkable for nail-polish."

"And, there, I entirely agree with him! As I am constantly telling Corinne, I consider the way people polish their nails, nowadays, is positively vulgar." Mrs. Witherby spoke emphatically and played her card with a righteous flourish.

"Mamma! It's my lead." There was more than a suggestion of anger in Corinne's voice.

Bowing, Dr. Wells handed his partner her card, saying politely:

"Your card."

"Corinne, you watch me like a hawk; as if you thought your own mother would cheat you if you weren't looking."

"Ah! but I always *am* looking," that young lady cried gayly.

There was a lull at the table after this family tiff, and the Judge seized the occasion to share the "exclusive," which had proved too thrilling to be kept to himself.

"Ah—give me your attention a moment. I have just read in my *Digest*, here, such a peculiar tale. A reigning prince of some little European state has run off."

"Dear, dear," Mrs. Lee said. "Was it a love-affair?"

"Ah—not precisely: though a princess had been arranged for him."

Even Miss Crewe felt a degree of interest in a run-away prince, or perhaps she felt that she had challenged her aunt's wrath long enough. She rose, as her cousin called to her:

"Oh, Mabel, come and hear about the prince. Do tell us more, Judge Giffen."

The Judge consulted his paper.

"Um—ah—here it is. Um—ah—odd chap. Very chivalrous and—ah—romantic; eccentric; fond of wandering about, incognito, and entering humble people's houses and—ah—making friends with them. Artistic. No love-affair suspected, but—ah—it seems he has never enjoyed *ruling*. Too sensitive. Been missing for months. The Court tried to—ah—hide the fact, but it is out now, and the whole world is aware that His Highness—wait a minute till I find the place, for it's a fearful name. Ah—here it is. His Highness, Prince Adam Lapid, reigning Duke of Woodseweedsetisky"—he stumbled over it badly.

"Good gracious!" Mabel said.

"Ah—His Highness has abdicated and run away in disguise, leaving a letter. Ah—this is the letter. Listen":

Dear Subjects, Councillors, and neighbouring Princes, including Her Highness Princess Olga of Damala-Binootshia, to whom processes of state have affianced me although I have never seen her. I herewith and hereby abdicate and renounce my hereditary right to the throne of Woodseweedsetisky. I am too sensitive to endure the criticisms aimed at royalty by heartless radicals. Recently I have received harsh words from a visiting, untitled stranger, whom I had employed in executing a beneficent and beautiful plan for my ungrateful subjects. It was not my fault that it was, later, found to be impossible to bring the water to the top of the mountain, where I had insisted that the fountain—a memorial to my father—be erected. Criticism of me on that account was unjust and cruel. It was not I who failed, but the water. I abdicate. I go to a place where there is no criticism. Farewell.

ADAM LAPID.

"Well! What a . . . "

The Judge silenced the interrupting chorus. "A postscript."

P. S. People who criticise me are ignorant. If they knew as much as I do they would act as I do. As for the visiting stranger—a person of no antecedents—who criticised me because of the fountain, I have put him in prison. Let him see whether his pointed criticisms are sharp enough to pick my prison locks. The top of the mountain was the proper place for the memorial fountain to my honoured father. It was not my fault that the water did not arrive there to spout. But when this stranger of humble birth said to me, "I told you water will not run uphill, even to oblige a prince," I put him in the prison. Farewell.

"Now, that's a remarkable tale, eh?"

"He's quite mad, of course," Howard said. Dr. Wells wanted to know what became of the man who designed the fountain where the water would not arrive to spout.

"Oh—ah—he escaped."

"So his criticisms *were* sharp enough to pick locks," the doctor chuckled, as joyfully as if the original jest had been his.

"Ah. Quite so. The Councillors suspected at first that the prince's disappearance and—ah—the whole thing was an anarchistic plot. But they are satisfied now that he really ran off of his own accord."

"Oh, isn't it thrilling?" Corinne clapped her hands again. Her large, round eyes had been growing larger and larger, throughout the recital, till it was impossible for them to stretch any more.

"I hope he'll keep his freedom, poor dear, and let the kingdom rage," Mabel said. There was a bitterness in her intonation, which always drew her aunt's anger, for Mrs. Witherby held that Mabel should feel humbled under the weight of gratitude.

"No doubt you feel so, Mabel," she said, acidly. "But most of us recognize duty and the importance of the world's opinion. Ah! there is our sweet hostess."

"Did we disturb you with our melodic outcries?"

Rosamond asked, blithely. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shining.

"We heard you, of course," Andrews remarked—meaning to be polite. He was leading a new round.

"You made *criticisms?*" the violinist asked, darkly.

"Oh, my dear Dr. Frei, we were charmed—utterly charmed."

Frei acknowledged Mrs. Witherby's impressive compliment with a low bow. He was very grave.

"Dr. Frei plays *so* beautifully." Rosamond thought she saw his sad mood coming upon him, and was eager to ward it off with sympathetic eulogies. Mrs. Lee, unawares, abetted her.

"Dear Dr. Frei, how much you have added to the natural charm of our dear old town by bringing your violin, and opening your little studio among us."

Frei bent and kissed her hand.

"You have a kind heart," he said, gratefully. "*You* criticise no one."

"Oh, I hope not," she replied. "The Judge has just been telling us about a poor dear man out in the great world—ah, well! Life must be very different in the vast cities, where people are strangers instead of neighbours. Think of that! Strangers instead of neighbours! How fortunate I am to live in Roseborough, where everybody is so interested in everybody else. Dear Mrs. Witherby, in particular,

takes such an interest." She patted that lady's arm. Mrs. Witherby, having lost the last round, had left the table. "Ah, well, that is the spirit of Roseborough."

"Some might call it a meddlesome spirit," Miss Crewe suggested.

"Oh, my dear child," Mrs. Lee reproved her, affectionately.

"I think we will not allow Mabel to interpret the spirit of Roseborough." Mrs. Witherby was smilingly spiteful.

"Where did you learn to play?" Judge Giffen drew Frei aside.

"In Warsaw."

"Ah! Indeed? I know Warsaw." He began to relate to Dr. Frei whatever incidents remained in his mind of his visit to the Polish capital, twenty-five years before.

Mrs. Witherby was assisting Mrs. Lee in gathering up her fancywork, scissors, spools and so forth, and was receiving in return that lady's ardent thanks for her help in notifying guests without telephones of Mr. Falcon's home-coming breakfast. Mabel lifted the old lady's white wool shawl and wrapped it about her.

"Oh, do come here, Mrs. Mearely!" cried Corinne, who was now alone at the card table. She caught Rosamond's hand and began excitedly, "Oh, Mrs.

Mearely, Judge Giffen has just read such a thrilling thing in the *Digest*. Just think! a real prince has run away from his throne, and taken a different name, but they don't know what it is and—and—he's gone looking for a real romance—and they think he has hidden himself in some little town. Oh! think; if he'd only come to Roseborough! Oh, Mrs. Mearely," she panted, "all my life I've wanted something wonderful to happen in Roseborough!"

Rosamond laughed, noting Corinne's breathless excitement rather than her news.

"My dear Corinne, nothing will ever happen in Roseborough."

Corinne almost wailed her protest at this hard saying.

"Oh, it *might* happen! Think if the prince came here. Oh, he *might*, Mrs. Mearely," she pleaded. "*He might.*"

Rosamond, smiling, shook her head, Seeing that Mrs. Lee was ready to leave, she threw her own wrap around her.

"Now, I must be off to bed. I have overstayed." Mrs. Lee was rejecting Mrs. Witherby's efforts to keep her "just another half hour." "One must go to sleep when the twilight ends, if one would really enjoy early rising. I think I may almost say I have not missed a sunrise for twenty years."

"Sunrise?" Howard repeated, "I often wonder

how you do it! I find half-past eight almost too early."

"Dr. Frei and I will go with you," Rosa. ıd said. Frei, hearing his name, turned. The Judge followed him for the purpose of concluding his arguments.

"As I was saying," he insisted, "I have only one criticism to make of Beethoven's sonatas . ."

Frei wheeled upon him, and silenced him with a commanding gesture.

"Do not make it!" he said, frowning fiercely as at the most hated of enemies. "Beethoven is not here to defend himself. Ach! I detest criticism. It is the speech c those who do not understand."

The judge, feeling aggrieved at this public snubbing, walked off, muttering under his breath: "Touchv fiddler!" Frei gave his arm to Mrs. Lee.

"Good-bye, for the present." Rosamond waited an instant to offer cheer to her remaining guests, before joining Mrs. Lee and Frei on the verandah. "Some of you will have time for another game before we return. The chess board is just as you and Wilton left it, Judge. When cards and chess pall, you will find sandwiches and salad, with perhaps a jelly or two and some of Amanda's parsnip wine on the dining-room table. I know we can't persuade Mrs. Lee."

"No, dear, not in the evening. Good-night, dear friends. I shall see you all at breakfast, to-morrow. A quarter to eleven. Don't fail me."

"We won't!" Corinne called to her, above the calmer promises of the older folk.

"Oh, joy! A new man is coming to Roseborough! Though I suppose he's pretty old," she added, after Mrs. Lee and her two escorts had disappeared. "Mrs. Lee calls men of fifty 'dear boys,' if they ever went to Charleroy."

Mrs. Witherby, Wells, and Andrews seated themselves at the card table. For the moment, Mrs. Witherby's mind was occupied with something more important than cards. Assuring herself that her niece could not hear her, she said:

"Mrs. Barton is not coming from Poplars Vale till next week, so I shall try to persuade Mrs. Mearely to let me leave our Thomas to sleep in the house here, to-night. With her sister absent, she is quite alone. You know, I consider it *suspicious* that her *two* maids should have been called to their sick mother's bedside the same day that her coachman was obliged to take the gray mare out to the farm. It leaves Mrs. Mearely *quite* alone. I consider it *very* suspicious. I think Mrs. Barton should have been sent for. I think it peculiar that Mrs. Mearely herself did not tell me about it."

Wells, who was dealing, replied humorously:

"But—the maids being sisters—naturally, if Jemima's mother is ill, so is Amanda's mother, te-he-he."

He was rewarded with a frosty glance.

"It pleases you to be facetious. Corinne, come—we are having another game."

Corinne came, none too willingly. The Judge, who had had enough of the *Digest* for that evening, nodded to Wilton.

"Er—shall we try the chessmen to-night, Howard? Perhaps Miss Crewe will sit by and inspire us."

Howard, anxious to avoid another tête-à-tête with Mabel, answered with alacrity, "By all means."

Mabel, yawning, sank among the cushions of the settee. She was not interested in chess, but she could watch her lover's profile from this position.

"Oh, I wish there were something *young* to do," Corinne protested. "Cards aren't young."

"I don't consider it safe for Mrs. Mearely to remain alone to-night," Mrs. Witherby resumed. "A most villainous-appearing man with a multitude of black whiskers has been seen lurking about. Johnson, the butcher's boy, told my maid, Hannah Ann, about it. He saw *him !*"

"I don't think Mrs. Mearely is timid," Andrews said.

"In my day, Mr. Andrews, it was not considered *well-bred* for women to make an exhibition of courage. They had it, but they suppressed it under a mask of timidity and sensitiveness. And the girls married easily at eighteen. And the widows were

wives again before they had reached the lavender stage of their mourning. I shall try to insist on Mrs. Mearely's keeping our Thomas to-night, and I do think it rash of her to don such a rich and conspicuous gown when she is entirely alone . . ."

"Oh, my trick again! Oh, goody!" Corinne broke in enthusiastically.

"Congratulations, fair partner." Andrews thought he had done very well with that speech. So did Corinne.

"Oh, you say such lovely things, Mr. Andrews!"

"Losing as usual, aunt?" Mabel's tone was delicately unpleasant. It angered her aunt.

"Not at all! I doubt if there is a woman in Roseborough who plays a better hand."

In turning to make her speech more impressive and to give Miss Crewe a broadside, as it were, of her displeasure, she had a full view of the verandah, and was in the nick of time to see a swarthy, black-whiskered face, topped by a soft, black felt hat, slowly raised over the verandah rail She panted twice from terror's cold shock; then screamed with all her might. The apparition disappeared.

"Eh? What?" Dr. Wells looked up, jerkily, from his cards. Howard had half risen, from habit, at the feminine cry of distress. The Judge, peering over his pince-nez, offered a practical explanation.

"A beetle? The summer bugs do bite."

"Mamma! I wish you wouldn't shriek when there's no need."

Mrs. Witherby was angry now as well as frightened. She gestured frantically and gasped.

"There—there! I *saw* him! Oh! the terrible man! Oh, quick—catch him—a man!"

She continued to point and wave and gasp at such a rate, that Judge Giffen and Wilton Howard, concealing their mirth as best they could, went to the verandah and made a perfunctory investigation. The movement of their shoulders suggested that they were not looking over the verandah rail so much as laughing over it. Miss Crewe gave herself up to an almost hysterical hilarity.

"You have so much imagination, Aunt Emma."

Dr. Wells cackled with delight, "Te-he-he! The cry of the eternal feminine—'Catch him! Catch the *man!*' Te-he-he."

"You *must* have seen him!" Mrs. Witherby's face was crimson with fury. She would have liked to tear out all the mocking eyes now regarding her.

"Not even a tiger," Howard informed her cheerfully.

"Nary cannibal," the Judge added, with facetious looks and stepping about on tiptoe as if in mortal fear of bogies.

"I *saw* him! I saw . . ." Words failed her. She played her card blindly, and took the trick.

This was the last straw, as far as Corinne was concerned.

"Mamma! It's *my* trick!" She snatched it away from her mother with trembling hands. Her nerves were taut from the scare she had received, for the wild shriek had been sent almost into her ear. It proved the last straw for Mrs. Witherby also.

"Corinne!" she thundered. "*This* is *too* much! Do you suppose your mother is going to sit here the whole evening and not take a single trick? How *dare* you assert yourself so?"

Corinne threw down her cards and burst into explosive sobs.

"I don't—I didn't—I never did. It was my trick." Wells patted her shoulder affectionately.

"There, there, dear child. Don't cry."

"What's this?" the Judge asked. "Our merry Corinne in tears?"

"No one thinks of *me*, the mother!" Mrs. Witherby whimpered.

"She—she—is always like that when she plays cards. What has—a—mother to do with trumps—and things?"

"Oh, you heartless child! And after the terrible fright I've had! Judge Giffen, your arm. I am not well."

"Eh, what?" The Judge resented nothing so much as being asked to leave his chess. "Oh—yes

—with pleasure. Let us seek the—ah—sympathetic seclusion of the dining room, eh? Mrs. Mearely spoke of sandwiches. Yes—ah—a sustaining sandwich."

"I couldn't eat a mouthful. I'm so upset. Corinne's behaviour—and—oh, Judge—that dreadful face! Oh, if you'd seen the villainous whiskers!"

"Yes—yes—a little—ah—salad. A glass of Amanda's parsnip wine." He guided her into the dining room.

"Shall we also refresh the inner soul, Miss Corinne?" Mr. Albert Andrews asked, with gallantry.

"Now I am quite sure that Mrs. Mearely has provided creams and a fine array of iridescent jellies to delight the youthful palate. Go with Andrews, dear child."

Corinne threw her arms around Dr. Wells's neck.

"I think you are just too dear for anything, Dr. Wells. I wish I could have you for a father."

"Heaven forbid!" he answered absently. "Er—that is—thank you, my dear. You are a very sweet girl, Corinne. Yes—considering the circumstances—a remarkably sweet girl," he added as the dining-room door closed behind the couple. He rose, taking his pipe from his pocket.

"Do you find Aunt Emma wearing, doctor?" Mabel inquired flippantly. "Some do."

"Oh, no, no! What a sad idea. I shall go out

now and have a pipe in the moonlight, and all the little cares will blow away with the smoke."

"Don't let Mrs. Witherby's wild man get you," Howard urged, laughing.

"Te-he-he! the good lady is so excitable; but she means well. I leave you to the pleasant task of dispelling pessimistic ideas from Miss Crewe's lovely head." He went out on tiptoe, with extravagant antics of mock caution.

CHAPTER XVI

HE'S a nice old chap," Howard remarked. She did not answer. He desired, at all hazards, to avoid an intimate talk so stepped quickly toward the supper room as if to open the door. "Let me conduct you to the crackers and cheese," he said with forced lightness.

"No. I want to speak to you."

"This is hardly a good opportunity," he pleaded.

"Come here, please." He hesitated only briefly; something new in her to-night warned him that it would be unwise to gainsay her.

"Wilton, I am being talked about—too much. Talk *does* things, after awhile. When is this going to end?" Her voice was strained with her effort to control herself.

"What?" His face was turned from her.

"When can I go to my aunt and tell her that you have asked me to marry you? She persecutes me about it."

"When you can answer your aunt's first question —'what are you and your husband going to live on?'" he replied glumly.

"Oh, the same old story. I'm sick of it. When a man *loves* he doesn't think of money."

Her tone cut into him. Her contempt was not easy to bear.

"I *do* love you," he asserted hotly, "but how could I support you? I've never worked. I can't earn a round sum at anything. But for cousin Hibbert Mearely's little legacy, I'd have been on the parish long ago. You and I can't live any life but this. We're not pioneer stuff. If we eloped to the swamps, the gnats would eat us—that's all."

"Don't talk like that! It sounds so cowardly. You must think of me. I can't face any more talk, and Aunt Emma's sneers . . ."

"I've been thinking of that. Mabel, we must face facts squarely."

"What do you mean?" tremulously.

"Our situation is hopeless. We can't marry. The only thing for us to do . . ."

"I know," she broke in bitterly. "I've heard you say that before, but I didn't believe you meant it. We must separate and marry money; if we can."

"Has society provided any other way of life for merely useless men like me, and merely ornamental women like you?"

She did not speak at once, but studied his face to find the reason for a mood so positive and malign. Across the screen of her thoughts floated a rose-and-silver gown—and she cried out as if she had been struck.

"I've been blind! I see it now. You mean to marry Rosamond."

"What an idea!" awkwardly, his eyes avoiding hers.

"Don't try to deceive me. You may as well admit it. You've told me you mean to throw me aside for some rich woman. Is it Rosamond? Yes, of course, it is! What has she done to make you think you have a chance with her?" She caught hold of his arm and turned him to her.

"Nothing," he sneered; "but I suspect it works both ways—this benign social law with its talk. It won't let us marry—because we're poor. Well, it won't let her alone, either—because she's rich. This is Rosamond's fourth year of widowhood. Gossip has its eye on her. She'll have to marry. I am a kinsman—being a distant cousin of her departed husband's. That gives me a more familiar footing here. Gossip will naturally pick me out as the most likely bridegroom. In other words, don't let their miserable, superwise social code crush you, but twist it round and use it to your own advantage."

The passion in her face seemed to blend all the bitter emotions—scorn, jealousy, deep anger—with a fierce resolve.

"I see," she answered presently, "I haven't any illusions about you, Wilton. I had once, of course. You're selfish. You don't really care what happens to anybody but yourself. While this thing has

dragged on and you have put off making it an open engagement, I've hoped and suffered everything—and you've let me. You know that we couldn't walk along the river-path three times together without all Roseborough chattering about it and wondering whether you would marry me—and then sneering at me because there was no announcement. You do care for me—more than you can ever care for any one but yourself. I'm not afraid of poverty—or work. Merely ornamental you called me! I do everything at Aunt Emma's—excepting the roughest work. I wouldn't mind if she'd be fair enough to say that I am not living on her charity, but that I earn what she gives me. Don't you suppose I could drudge for you and myself as I do for her and Corinne? And I'd have my own home—even if it was only two rooms, and not be slighted and treated contemptuously as a poor hanger-on." A hard, dry sob shook her. "I *won't* go back to that awful life with aunt—without you—without any hope. You can't be so cruel to me."

Howard winced. He had natural feeling enough to be ashamed of himself; and his emotion for her was stirred by her intensity.

"Mabel, dear, need you say all this? You know I love you. You have said so. But—it's hopeless. I haven't enough to keep us even in the poorest comfort. We've got to end it."

She shook her head.

"Don't delude yourself. I will not be given up. You came and sought me and paid me attentions. You let me think you meant to marry me. And I've let you kiss me. I suppose that doesn't mean anything to a man. But it does to a girl. I kissed you as the man I was going to belong to. I'd feel degraded if I could change. No, Wilton. You have brought something into power in me that you will have to reckon with. It controls me utterly; and I mean that it shall govern you, too. You shall never marry Rosamond or any one but me. I will stop it somehow. I'll give Aunt Emma something worth while to talk about!"

"Hush! Don't talk so wildly. If there were really a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, don't you suppose I'd rather set off with you to find it?"

He took her into his arms suddenly. She yielded to his embrace, as if it soothed the wound he had dealt her love and her faith.

"Oh, Mabel, I've ceased to feel responsibility about anything. I'm simply a product of this bloodless, stagnant little village. Conditions rule individuals. Accept the facts, dear, and be wise."

She put her arms round his neck. If her resolution did not falter, tenderness overflowed it for the moment. She recognized that what he said of himself was true—"the product of a bloodless, stagnant

village." She thought that he did not love her less than she loved him, but that he believed that the Roseborough which had shaped him must conquer him; whereas, she, of more rebellious clay, had thrown down the gauntlet to Roseborough. They clung to each other recklessly, then tore apart, because they heard Rosamond's voice in the garden and the doctor's answering.

Regaining a show of composure, they went into the dining room. The doctor—entering with Rosamond and Frei—was induced by his hostess's urging to risk his digestion with "one small sandwich and a thimbleful of wine."

Frei was humming, with a bland and childlike look on his face. He picked up his violin from the desk where he had laid it and put it into its case.

"Will you not sup, too?" she asked him.

"No, I thank you." He came toward her. "My body needs no salads, for my soul is satisfied. I have found a place where there is no criticism; where the memorial fountains of kindness are unsealed—and the waters do arrive. Here, in Roseborough—'here, where all hearts are tender and sincere'—surely I shall find at last a beautiful woman to love me for myself alone."

"Why not?" she said kindly. "It is given to every man . . .'

She stopped in quoting what she, herself, had said

to him in the orchard, because of the change in his face. He strode forward and gazed intently into her eyes.

"Ach!" he cried, as if she had now burst upon his sight for the first time. "*You* are beautiful!" He seized her hand. "Could you love me for myself alone?"

"Oh—oh!" She was startled. "I think your music would share in any love given to you," she panted.

"That I permit. My music is me."

"Oh, yes; but—it is also Tschaikowsky, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Chopin . . ."

Instantly his head drooped and his face was overcast with gloom.

"True. I am nothing—but to play the tunes of others." He sighed heavily. Then, recovering from this humour, he drew himself up with a regal air. "I will overlook your birth and station, because you are beautiful and good. Here—here in Roseborough—with your devotion to console me; here—in this peaceful village—is my journey's end. Later, when you have won my confidence by your serviceable affection, I will reveal to you certain matters. These may prevent our marriage——"

"Er—oh—I mean aren't you a little precipitate . . . ?"

He waved her to silence.

"If our union be prevented, I shall still regard you with a noble and platonic affection. And you will be forever faithful and devoted to me." He was obliged to conclude abruptly, for the other guests came in from the supper room.

"Mercy!" Rosamond said, under her breath, and removed herself from the impetuous musician's proximity as quickly as possible.

"Well, we're off," the Judge announced. "Our lovely ladies must not lose their beauty sleep. It must be far along after nine."

Mrs. Witherby plucked at her hostess's sleeve.

"Now, are you *sure* there's to be no interesting little item given out, to match that gown? I find it almost impossible to believe it was put on only for *us*. Well," as she saw Rosamond frown, "keep your secret." She was half way to the door, when she turned back and said: "Oh, do—do let me leave our Thomas. I can drive myself home. I feel so alarmed about you. I can't endure the thought of your being alone. I wonder you didn't tell me about it. Blake told the toll-man and the toll-man told Johnson, the butcher's boy. So it's publicly known that you are alone in this house to-night!" She was working herself up to a lively pitch, ignoring attempts at interruption from the Judge, who had had quite enough of her and her fears for one evening. "I assure you that just now I saw . . ."

Mabel led the burst of laughter which put an end to her discourse. It was useless to talk against such a gale of hilarity. Rosamond caught the infection and laughed as unrestrainedly as the rest.

"It is so good to laugh," she said; "I never miss the opportunity. But please tell me what I am laughing at."

Dr. Wells with little snickers, and glancing sidewise at Mrs. Witherby to see how far he dared provoke her—that he might go just one step further—undertook to enlighten her.

"Te-he—our dear Mrs. Witherby saw a spotted cannibal peering in at the window; te-he-he."

""Twas—ah—Oolabaloo, the—ah—Matabele wild man." The Judge was airily facetious.

"He wore a battle club and a wreath of daisies, the evening being cool," Wilton Howard supplemented, whereupon every one roared again; except Dr. Frei, whose foreign intellect did not adapt itself readily to Anglo-Saxon humour. He was regarding the infuriated lady with sympathy and credence.

"But if she says she saw something . . ." he protested in her behalf, only to draw forth another peal of mirth.

He turned to Rosamond solicitously. "There is danger to you?"

"Oh, no! none. Tramps never come to Rosebor-

ough. Besides, I—I have a pistol—though I've never shot anything but bottles and rabbits, and never expect to!"

Mrs. Witherby was not easily overborne at any time, less than ever when she knew she was not inventing.

"I tell you, I saw distinctly . . ." She took a few steps toward the verandah, in order to point out the exact spot where the face had appeared. It happened, unfortunately, that every one was looking at her and laughing, instead of following the direction of her pointing finger. Once again, hers were the only eyes to see the swarthy face raised, this time till the tip of its nose was level with the rail. She screamed in long, piercing wails. The face withdrew.

"There!—there!—again!—I saw . . . !"

Every one laughed again except Frei. Mrs. Mearely, forgetful of her acquired deportment, put her hands on her hips and swayed with the ripples of her joy. Dr. Wells doubled up and choked, till the Judge was obliged to pat him on the back with a hand weak from his own mirth. The farewells were lost in the echoes of laughter.

"You think you really saw something?" Frei asked, as he offered his arm to Mrs. Witherby, who was trembling from alarm and insult.

"I shall notify the authorities. I am quite positive I saw him—*absolutely positive!*"

"Don't let mamma frighten you, Dr. Frei. Wait till you know her as well as I do!" Corinne suppressed her giggles long enough to kiss her hostess good-night. She ran out after her mother.

"Coming, Howard?" asked Wells over his shoulder.

"I'll catch up with you at the foot of the hill. I think I'll satisfy myself that my cousin's bolts and bars are all in working order."

"Te-he—our poor, dear Mrs. Witherby—*such* imagination!" The doctor waved his hand, smiling, and went out.

"Good-night, Mrs. Mearely."

Rosamond had gone to the verandah rail to wave her guests down the hill. She was slightly startled to come upon Miss Crewe standing in the shadow, and evidently watching Howard.

"Good-night," she said. "I hear your aunt calling you." She was aware of a sombre flash from Mabel's dark eyes; then the slender figure moved off with leisurely pace and the bearing of a princess—at least, so Rosamond, in her own mind, described Miss Crewe's walk. One by one, the carts and buggies started round the gravel drive to the hill-road. As they passed just under the jut where the house stood, Mrs. Mearely leaned over the rail and called her good-nights.

CHAPTER XVII

SHE loitered on the step, even after the sound of wheels grew dim. Her eyes feasted on the golden river and her ears caught the pleasant notes of insects and night birds; but her mind was alert and practical to the moment. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Howard, standing by the chimney-piece and leaning upon it in a handsome and familiar attitude. He could not have looked more at home if he had owned the house. A sense of anger stirred in her.

"If he were old I could understand it. Old men naturally want a snug home to die in!" Then, as was habitual with her, amusement took the place of indignation. "To-morrow I'll hang a crape bow and streamers between my shoulder-blades and go my way in lonesome peace."

Thinking that she might as well have it over with, she went indoors slowly. She looked quizzically at Howard as she said, with pointed emphasis on the degree of relationship:

"Well, Mr. Fifth-Cousin-by-Marriage, what is this legend about my bolts and bars? I shall leave my windows open as usual, I suppose."

"Oh! that was an excuse, of course—and a thin one. Dear Rosamond, I wonder if you have any idea why I have lingered?"

His assumption of tenderness did not please her. She sank into the big chair by the settee, making herself comfortable with cushions and footstool. If she must hear another proposal of marriage that day, she would at least hear it at her ease.

"I've seen it taking shape, but I did hope you wouldn't," she said shortly.

"Wouldn't what?" in surprise, for no indication of her humour had reached him.

"Propose. That is what you are about to do, isn't it?" She let him see that she felt a malicious enjoyment in his embarrassment.

Howard had been totally unprepared for her sally and he resented being made to look foolish; but, after the first hesitation, he decided to go on, according to his plan. Rosamond must marry; if she did not know that she must marry, he would soon convince her that a prolonged and colourful widowhood, with honour, could not be *her* portion in Roseborough. She must marry, and where could she find a more suitable husband than himself? (Like Judge Giffen and Mr. Albert Andrews, he also considered himself her inevitable choice.)

"Perhaps I ought hardly to go so far without more preparation; but—er—Rosamond, jealousy

of your friendship with the musical newcomer to Roseborough has made me seem precipitate. But I have desired to say all this to you for a long time."

He was young, magnetic, and of her own race, and suddenly her longing for comradeship went out to him.

"Oh, Wilton," she almost pleaded, "I don't want to marry you. I won't say that I never mean to marry, because some one *might* come. Yet, if he were interesting enough to love, why would he ever come to Roseborough? No, I couldn't love Dr. Frei. But I wish I could marry the song of his fiddle and be blown off on the wind with my bridegroom a thousand leagues from here."

"My dear girl, have you not lived happily here, where you are beloved by all?"

She made a wry face.

"Can't even you understand me a little? You're *young*."

"I *wish* to understand you, above everything."

"Can't you guess what it's been like, underneath the—the—velvet surface? When I was a poor young girl in Poplars Vale I longed for a finished education and a high station. Hibbert Mearely was fifty-three when my ingenuous countenance met his collector's eye. He put me here—as a living ornament—among his paintings and his books and antiques where

everything is old and stable and has a set value. Look at the chairs; when you sit down, you feel you are settled there for life—and will not move again till some one carries you to the churchyard. I came here so proudly—to be the wife of such a fine, distinguished gentleman. I thought it would be a wonderful life—with all this," she waved her hands to indicate the furnishings of Mr. Mearely's museum. "But it wasn't. It was dreadful. In its heart, Roseborough still regards me as an alien and an upstart. My mother once sold butter. They remember that. They are waiting for a chance to rub it in. Now that my crape is two years behind me, the three or four bachelors and the five widowers are eager to pounce on me with marriage. And all the women are ready to destroy me with gossip."

She ceased abruptly, holding out her hands to him with a plea for help, for friendship and an open door of escape that should not bear the sign "Matrimony" on the centre panel. Howard took her hands and bent over them, giving her the benefit, too, of his magnetic and confident smile. He saw in her appeal exactly the opportunity he needed.

"That, partly, is what hastens my offer. Gossip is inevitable. Why not forestall it? As a matter of fact, a young woman cannot remain alone—more especially if she is a widow, and beautiful." He kissed her hand.

"And rich," she said dryly—as if completing his sentence for him—and withdrew her hand.

"I—er—I hope you do not do me that injustice." He spoke with hurt dignity.

"Oh, certainly not," she answered flippantly. "That is always understood in offers of this kind."

Howard was becoming angry He told himself that he had not given up Mabel, whom he loved, and done the butter-maker's daughter the honour to offer her himself in marriage, in order to let her insult him as the mood swayed her. He spoke calmly but with the accents of a superior.

"You are cynical, my dear. Are you worldly-wise enough to realize that Roseborough will *make* you marry?"

She walked away from him across the room.

"Yes, I know it. One link after another in the chain about me till I'm crushed flat," desperately—"and old—*old!*" A sob escaped her. She picked up the pack of cards and tossed them loose over the table, as if her last chance of happiness were proved no more than bits of pasteboard and she had cast it from her as worthless. Wilton, thinking her agitation in his favour, went to her.

"Perhaps," she said, eyeing him resentfully, "it might as well be you as any one."

"Might it not *better* be I than any one?" he demanded, capturing her hand again.

"Yes, I suppose so," she replied, considering it impersonally. "You're young."

"Then it is 'yes'?" ardently.

She pulled her hand away and came out of her abstraction.

"Good gracious, no!" bluntly. "Not so fast, cousin. I am much too sleepy to decide anything so important to-night. Besides, to-night I am in love with the song of the fiddle. And you are not that song!" She sighed.

"A much more substantial lover," he answered laughingly.

"Stupid thing!" she thought. "I suppose you think your 'substantial' person has more power to stir me than the echoes of Tschaikowsky!"

"And when?" he began.

"Do say good-night, like a good fellow. I am so tired. I want to go to bed at once—and sleep forever." She walked out to the verandah, compelling him to follow. "I'll think you over."

"I hope you'll think kindly," he said, with a softness in his voice and his eyes that he had not shown her before. But Mabel could have told her how one woman, at least, yearned to him because of that note in his gamut, for which he deserved as little credit as for the shape of his nose.

"Oh, Wilton! I am so—so tired!" Her lip quivered. "Nothing but this same narrow little life,

over and over—daily—yearly! Oh! Look at the river, running away so swiftly and freely; it is the only thing that ever came to Roseborough and got away again! Every time I look at it, I think it is laughing at me. It laughed at me down there in Poplars Vale. It mocks me more cruelly here, with its swift journeying to—somewhere."

Turning to him, in her irrepressible longing for sympathy, she saw that he did not understand her in the least, but was studying how he might best impress her by a loverlike pose.

"I'll think you over," she promised airily. "Good-night. Go, before I fall asleep at your feet," she added, with the rather cruel intimation that there was nothing about his wooing which could conquer her boredom. By a quick, vigorous handshake she prevented him from kissing her fingers again. She caught up his cap and gloves from the settle and pressed them into his arms. He went out, smiling; for he believed this haste to be rid of him was in reality a tribute to his irresistible powers of fascination.

"Good-night, dear Rosamond. Good-night. Sleep soundly," he called from below the wall, as his dog-cart went by.

Rosamond made no reply. She stood by the rail, looking at the "velvety star-veined night" and the river. The noise of wheels died down; the only

sound was the chirring of crickets. She turned off the verandah light. She came into the room and went about, methodically putting out all the individual lamps but one. This she left on for a purpose, it appeared; because, presently, she found a little leather-bound book o the flower-stand by the fireplace, and slid up into a corner of the settee with it. In settling herself she almost knocked a paper off the arm-piece.

"Dear me," she said aloud. "The Judge's sacred *Digest!* How could he have forgotten it? I suppose Mrs. Witherby's hysterics must have put it out of his head."

She glanced at it idly and her eye was caught by the first column.

"Corinne's runaway prince!" She smiled, and began to read. When she had perused the story she laid the *Digest* aside, musing on the Royal Highness whose heart was so oddly in tune with her own.

"Eccentric—romantic—artistic," she repeated. "Fond of wandering about incognito—and entering humble dwellings—and making friends. Making friends." She dwelt wistfully on the last words.

The little copy of Browning opened naturally at the place she sought; and she need not have opened it at all, for she knew by heart the lines she loved. This, it may be pointed out, was not her late master's "first edition," autographed by Princess Victoria

for sale at the Indian Famine Relief Bazaar. She had bought this copy for herself and loved it for its contents, not for its binding nor for a scrawl on its fly-leaf. Softly, she said the lines:

"'While not a man of them broke rank and spoke,
Or wrote me a vulgar letter all of love,
Or caught my hand and pressed it like a hand.
There have been moments if the sentinel,
Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,
I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.'"

She laid the book on the stand and sat quite still and silent for some time, then she murmured:

"We're all alike, the queen and I, Corinne and her runaway prince. I wonder if all the world is longing just for—something different?"

The large room was almost dark; its only light came from the one little lamp on the mantel, which cast its dim halo upon her, and from the open door of the music room. Outside, the moon, the stars, and the river shed their mystic radiance over and through the slumbering valley.

"If there could only have been one word from some one—one note out of the earth or the sky—to promise me something . . ."

Clear, mellow, and resonant, one note rang out from the tower and rolled like an invisible golden wheel up the hills and down the valley.

Rosamond sat up, straining her ears.

"The tower bell!" she whispered. "It rang!—once! And it never rings after six!"

The sound was not repeated, and, after a time, she began to ask herself if perhaps she had not nodded for a second and dreamed that she heard the bell. She rose and went into the dining room to turn off the lights. Then she put out the little lamp on the chimney-piece and passed into the music room where she busied herself in replacing the Tschaikowsky album in the music rack and in closing the piano. The last duty here was to turn out the tall stand-lamp.

"I wonder *did* I dream that bell?" she queried, as she came back to the living room.

If she had not been wondering so absorbedly about the bell, she might have heard another and slighter noise much closer at hand. That noise was the sound of a light-footed creature terminating a leap in the centre of her verandah. Just prior to that sound, a man's figure had been silhouetted against the moonlit sky, as he climbed nimbly and stood an instant on the railing.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Rosamond stepped over the threshold she was conscious of motion in the living room. She stood still and strained her eyes into the dusk of the room. She saw a figure emerge from the shadows and, feeling its way about, arrive at the table behind the settee which supported one of Mr. Hibbert Mearely's genuine antiques—a bronze vase.

"Ah! What's this?" he muttered, as his fingers felt about its design.

Rosamond knew now that the impossible had occurred: a burglar had come to Koseborough. Her knees evinced a tendency to fold up and let her shaking body find support upon the floor; but her soul was not a coward. She held her breath and tiptoed to the desk. Noiselessly, she pulled out the drawer and closed her clammy fingers about the pistol. The dining room and quarters beyond provided the best channels of escape, if she must flee, so she crept across the room behind the marauder, just as he moved toward the chimney-piece, where the Louis XV snuff-boxes were set all in a row and ticketed.

"Stop!—stop!" She quavered sternly, pointing the pistol at him.

He wheeled sharply and exclaimed in surprise:

"Oh! Are you up? er—I beg . . ."

"Who are you?" she demanded, with an access of courage due to the fact that he had not immediately murdered her. She recalled that, in books, one always firmly and at once asked a masked assassin or highwayman to disclose his identity.

"Ah!" said he, "that is what I was about to ask you."

"*Who—are—you?*" She wondered if that high, wavering voice was hers.

A sound came from him which she could not associate with any emotion of fear or shame, proper to a burglarious tramp caught in the act. He removed his hat with a sweep, and bowed.

"Madam, I am a bird of the air, seeking my meat from God."

Noting his accent, which was that of an educated man, Mrs. Mearely's alarm decreased, but she did not relax vigilance.

"That is poetic, but vague. *Who are you, and what are you doing here?*"

"My biography, in short. Briefly, then, I am a poet out of a job. Second stanza, I entered your home in the hope of finding food. Refrain, I am a hungry, hungry, hungry man."

This, she thought, was obviously insincere and merited rebuke.

"I do not believe you!"

"Well, perhaps not," cheerfully. "Nevertheless I *am* hungry. I always prefer to tell the truth, irrespective of people's beliefs. Allow me to turn on the light."

"Don't move! Stay where you are." She waved the pistol at him, as she saw his hand reach to the mantel.

"I don't need to move. The globe is here. Allow me." He turned on the light. In its soft small gleam they regarded each other, and for the first few moments had nothing to say.

Rosamond saw a man who was presumably in his "middle thirties"—a strong, well-built man, with breadth of shoulder and depth of chest, and with face and hands tanned by years of turning them, unprotected, toward all weathers. He had no beard or moustache. His face was lean, and broad at the brow and chin; his eyes large, deep-set, and dark; and his mouth wide—with firmness, humour, and sympathy in the lines about it. His hat was a large battered felt, of weather-stained hue, trimmed with a long, slender feather, dropped on the fields by a pheasant and appropriated by this tramp who had an eye for ornamentation. He wore in his belt a spray of pine, with small cones forming on it. His clothes were brown, rough, and spattered with burrs. The coat—a loose thing, held in by a dark, carved

leather belt, must have had half a dozen deep pockets in it. His trouser-legs were rolled up and it was evident that his thick socks and his boots were wet through. His black hair gleamed about his forehead, suggesting that he had had his head, as well as his feet, in the brooks that coursed the fields to spill their crystal into the river. The light was behind him, and she could not see whether his physiognomy bore the marks of a life of crime, as his raiment bore the marks of his profession—a gentleman of the road. Though his speech was peculiar, she noticed, gratefully, that it was clear. While the double pockets on both sides of his coat bulged, their irregular convexity, she saw, was not due to bottles.

In the matter of view, he had the advantage; for the globe sent its rays directly upon her, and she bloomed out of the shadows like some legendary princess arriving from the Kingdom of Nowhere on a shaft of light, wrapped in the silver radiance of the moon and the petals of a rose.

"Why, you are *young!*" he said at last, in a low tone of such charmed wonder as a wet and burr-bedecked vagabond might naturally feel at the apparition of a fairy princess. "Only a girl. From your voice, so sweet and cold and prim, I judged you to be as old as—as my heart."

She was unprepared for this mode of address and did not know how to answer it; but she kept promi-

"Rosamond saw a man who was presumably in his 'middle thirties'— a strong, well-built man, with face and hands tanned by years of turning them, unprotected, toward all weathers"

nently in her mind the rules for dealing with bandits, as she had gathered them from her reading, namely, to avoid angering them unduly, and never to show fear. She waggled the pistol at him and said with dignity:

"You see I am not afraid of you."

She saw that he smiled.

"Are you not? H'm—I am afraid of you." He looked about him for some time before he spoke again, then said, "Since I have answered your questions so satisfactorily, will you reciprocate by telling what relation you are to this house?"

"I own it."

He stared about again before answering.

"Do you? Do you indeed? That is very peculiar. Now, if you had said you owned a corner in heaven, or a bit of fairyland, I should have said: 'Naturally. I believe you.' But when 'a rare and radiant maiden' appears by magic at midnight, in the midst of—of—er—the village museum, and says 'I own it'—well, you won't think me impolite, I hope, if I say you are mistaken?"

"This is *not* the 'village museum'! It is my home, and I own it all myself." She spoke heatedly, because the museum character of Villa Rose was secretly a sore subject with her.

"How interesting. Won't you be seated? No? As you please. No doubt you feel safer standing—

with three doors to escape by. And I dare say if I said 'booh!' you'd try to dash through all three of 'em at once." He walked about slowly, taking different views of the museum's contents. "Some very good things—and some . . . not" he murmured.

"You—you must understand that I—I do not wish to shoot you unless it is quite necessary," she stammered. "But if it *is* necessary, I—I do know how to shoot. I—I am not helpless." She drew herself up and straightened her pistol arm. "I have *killed*—rabbits!"

"Have you?" He chuckled. "Call me Bunny, but, oh, do not shoot!" At that moment his gaze fell upon the landscape hanging over the desk. "Ah!" he cried, "a Turner—a real Turner!" He strode forward to get a better look at it. His movement brought him close to Rosamond, and, suspecting attack, she thrust her weapon at him with a violent gesture. He threw his hands up over his head but continued to enjoy the picture.

"A beautiful thing. A poem in colour. Turner is the poet's painter. He not only *saw* Nature, he *listened* to her and communed with her, as a poet; then he translated what he heard through colour. Can't you hear the scarlet trumpets blowing across that sunset?" In speaking he moved back and sidewise, trying different angles of vision, still dutifully

keeping his hands up. Presently he turned to her. The light was on his face and she saw how warm and merry his smile was. "That is the only real beauty after all—the beauty of truth. Dear lady, I am sorry I alarm you so. Just see how thoroughly at home *I* feel."

"I am not alarmed," she protested.

"It is only terror that is evil enough—or mad enough—to point death at a brother human."

He put his hand over the pistol, looked into her face, smiling whimsically, then coolly took the pistol from her and tossed it on the table.

"You—you are the strangest tramp I ever saw," she gasped.

"Tramp? Oh! Am I? Then look well at me—that noble and pathetic figure, the tramp! Madam, the rich world you live in occasionally produces a man like me, but it soon casts him out!" He sighed heavily.

Like most persons who have been lifted above their original station in life, Mrs. Mearely thought others should keep to theirs. So she said, with a degree of pride:

"What do you know of the world I live in?"

"Lady," he whined, "I'll tell you my secret. Once I, too, was respectable; but I have lived it down." He sat down on the arm of an old mahogany chair, as casually as if it were a stump by the woodside,

and picked burrs from his stockings. Evidently they had pricked him as his ankles swung together.

"Why did you leave my world—if, indeed, you were ever in it?"

"My biography, revised edition. I left your world because I had no affinity with it. I was born to be a poet. I found, however, that society felt no need of me and my verses. Society does not need poets. Society's great need is chauffeurs! And I could never stomach the smell of gasolene."

"But, even so, need you have become a tramp—an outcast? A—a vagabond who enters houses at night for food? Frightening people!" Her indignation rose. "Why don't you *work?*"

He looked at her keenly, pointing at her with the burr he had just caught between forefinger and thumb.

"Madam, do *you* work? Is this house—that gown—a charming gown, too—the result of *your* labour?"

"No," she admitted; and, after a brief pause, answering the unworded question she felt those keen eyes were asking, she added: "I married for this house and this gown."

"Ah! then you, too, do cowardly things. You dared not face life without wealth, so you sold yourself at so much per inch of beauty. Dear lady, you are a parasite—and selfish, withal! What right

have you, who married for food, to blame me for taking food without the preliminary of a church ceremony?"

Rosamond's tone was plaintive and offended.

"You say very unpleasant things. You make very severe criticisms. You have no right to enter my house in the middle of the night and criticise."

He made a gesture of alarm, and laughed.

"No, no! Heaven forbid! I make no more criticisms. I've suffered too much from my critical tongue. Do you know there are places where they put critics in prison?"

"You said you came for food. Did you find it?"

"Not yet," hopefully. "Occasionally, in my wanderings, I have lived on the back porches of the charitable in the great cities. Also I have dined with princes—at great cost!" He smothered a laugh.

There was a silence; then she asked, a little wistfully:

"Who are you?"

He leaned forward, smiling, frankly charmed by her.

"I've told you. I am a bird of passage and I skim over the cities, on my way to places where no cities are. In passing, I stopped but an instant to sup with you. Only an instant, for summer is fleeing, and I must away with her."

"And whither are you and summer going?"

"With summer I turn my back on the crowded marts of men. In the heart of a forest is a hut, built over a stream that laughs and sings to me through storm and sun. And there I live till the snows drive me to the place of humans again. There I write and dream—and dream and write—with none to say me nay. Some day I shall buy that hut—so that others may share my knowledge that it is mine."

"And never have anything more than that?" thoughtfully.

"What more does a man need? See how your world—with its gowns and houses you married for—has deluded you. You have never found out that it is not *things* which make one's life rich and radiant."

She heard the tone of sympathy for which, it seemed to her, she had waited a very long lifetime, and her answer came with a little outburst of feeling.

"I *have* found it out. My life is one long boredom. In that respect it is not so different from the other lives I see lived around me."

"Only other people deceive themselves more successfully?"

"Yes. How you *understand!*" She smiled, and made a movement of confidence toward him. "Is it true that you are hungry?"

"*Very* true." He rose and stood beside her, smiling down into her upturned face. "Are you about to offer the vagabond a few crumbs from the rich man's table?"

"The rich man is gone. But his goods remain; and I can offer you the food that is necessary even to a dreamer. Sit down. I will get it for you." She went to the tall lamp behind the card table and turned it on.

"The Lord bless ye, kind leddy. It's a good deed ye are doin' this day."

She laughed.

"It's a fair exchange. You give me a new experience. I give you food."

"A rare experience to me, if not exactly a new one," he retorted cheerily. "It will be very wonderful to be waited on by you—to eat your supper—surrounded by these—er—beautiful and priceless—that is to say, high-priced—*objets d'art.*"

In following her toward the dining-room door, he passed the bookcase with its central ornament, the jade-and-gold Buddha.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed. "Here *is* something!" Catching it up he ran toward the nearest light with it, and thereby re-awakened Rosamond's fears. She flew for her weapon. He put the Buddha back in its place and came to her.

"And still you fear and doubt," he chided. "Well,

take your little gun, since you believe that your goods are safe only when you have death in your hand."

"I can't help it!" She looked at him, ashamed, pathetic, defiant.

"Too bad—too bad." His eyes twinkled.

The colour flamed to her brow. Her eyes wavered from his. With a sudden, reckless motion, she tossed the little weapon on the table toward him.

"There! And I don't know who you are!"

Smiling, with open delight in her, he reached for the pistol, drew the charges, and dropped them into a vase on the bookcase.

"Much safer on the whole; don't you think so, *child?*"

"Oh!" she cried passionately. "You make me feel like—like—so foolish!" Avoiding his merry eyes, she dashed into the dining room.

"It's extraordinary," he muttered, moving about the room. "It *should* be the house. But, of course, it can't be. And where did *she* come from—the little lady curator of the museum?"

He was hampered in his investigations by his hostess. She was in and out with table-cloth, napkins, trays of bread and butter, sandwiches, salad, and whatever she felt would appease a hungry, though refined, tramp's appetite. At one turn in his peregrinations about the apartment he arrived

at the flower-stand behind the settee, and saw the small volume lying there.

"What, Browning?" he exclaimed. "Does she *read* him? or does he only ornament her table?" He opened it at the flyleaf. "'From Rosamond Mearely to herself.' How delicious!" He explored further, unaware that the owner of the book was watching him and straining her ears to hear his self-communings. "Yes, she reads him, and marks her favourite passages like a girl in her teens——. What's this?"

> There is no good of life but love—but love.
> Never you cheat yourself one instant! Love,
> Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest.

"Ah ha! 'Never you cheat yourself.' With her little pencil she underscores the line, and so confesses to any one who opens the book that she cheated herself when she married Mr. Money-Bags Mearely." He looked for more self-revelations, and found the passage she had said aloud to herself, there, just before the one bell-note had rolled through the valley.

> There have been moments if the Sentinel,
> Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
> Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,
> I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.

Who could have comprehended?
Why no one—but this one who did.
————even now perhaps it comes too late.

"Oh, Rosamond Mearely! Oh, merely Rosamond! 'Who could have comprehended?'"

He laid the book down, saying her name softly to himself.

"It—it's all ready," she called, timidly, hoping that her blush would not be noticed. She did not wish even so charming a vagabond as this midnight visitor to see how his reading of her favourite passages had stirred her. In her own heart, she always held that it was the queen of Villa Rose and not the queen of Browning's "In a Balcony," who had first uttered those lines.

"The vagabond thanks Mrs. Mearely profoundly for her kindness. You see I have discovered your name among the treasures of this room." He helped her take the dishes off the tray and arrange them on the table.

"Mrs. Mearely accepts no thanks for pleasing herself," she replied, colouring again and refusing to let her eyes meet his, lest he should look through them into her mind and find confirmation of what the pencil marks in the book had told him. She pointed to a chair. "Eat, Vagabond!"

"Will you not share the beggar's crust?" whimsically.

"It does make me feel hungry."

"Good! Sit, then, and I'll serve you: for, mind you, you are only a guest at this wayside meal. I see just one slice of bread and butter I think I can spare."

"Oh, stingy!" she cried. A happy little laugh bubbled from her as she slipped into a chair at his side. He helped her; then, proving his earlier assertions, fell to with a will.

"Not stingy," he mumbled, through bread and butter. "But *you* have already eaten three big, fat meals to-day."

"I haven't!" she protested. This was a most unfair charge. He went on:

"Eating *now* is a mere—a Mearely—woman's whim with you. You want this supper just because it is mine!" He attacked the salad, hungrily.

"Well! *I gave* it to you, didn't I?" she demanded indignantly.

"And now, womanlike, you want to take it back. Never!—while I have teeth!"—biting into the sandwich he had been waving to emphasize his remarks. "Don't plume yourself on your charity, either, dear young Baroness of Castle de Junk——"

"Oh!" she scolded.

"Because you know you had to give me something to keep me from robbing the museum."

"It's not a museum!" She stamped her foot.

He laughed. They supped in silence for several minutes.

"You know," he said, as he held his cup for coffee, "after all, there is a certain satisfaction in food. Nothing else gives one quite the same feeling of completeness." She nodded. "By the way, you can probably tell me if this is the only little hillside town like this in the neighbourhood with houses like this. Even a tramp sometimes likes to know where he is—on a dark night."

"There are the two towns, Roseborough and Poplars Vale. Roseborough is the older. Poplars Vale used to be just a farm and a corner store. Now, you see, it is quite a place. Almost like Roseborough."

"Well, well; that accounts for it! Poplars Vale, eh?" he muttered. "And I thought it was Roseborough." Busy with the coffee-pot she did not hear him. He leaned toward her. "Are the two towns comfortably close to each other?"

"What? Oh, yes. An hour's ride."

"Only an hour's separation? What a charming arrangement," surveying her with pleasure as she dropped two lumps into his cup. "What a queer sugar-bowl?" he lifted it. "Sterling?"

"Oh—no—o. I suppose not."

He laughed.

"Shame on you for a fibster! you are still a wee mite afraid I may put it in my pocket. And what

would I do with a monstrous thing like that—all top-heavy with a row of little deformed cupids. 'Tis cumbersome and unsightly—and quite useless. It reminds me of a royal tea-service I've seen—than which nothing could be uglier. A white china bowl would be prettier—and cleaner." He set it down. "If I took it I would not do so ill as the thief, Ambition, who came into your house of life before me, and robbed you of your faith and the ability to be glad. Believe me, faith—joyous faith—is worth more than many silver bowls—and deformed little cupids," he smiled.

"True, perhaps," she said, thoughtfully. Suddenly she was stirred to resentment at life and at him also; for his joyous, impudent freedom seemed to make her feel her caged condition more than ever before. She pushed her plate away, and rose. "And yet—do you suppose I could have been robbed of it if I'd ever possessed a glad faith? It is not for you to criticise me, is it?" She spoke with a trace of haughtiness. "Let us think no more of serious things. Eating, drinking, comfort, and ease—there's my definition of life, Vagabond. And it seems to agree with yours." She pointed to his plate. He turned on her suddenly.

"Why do you lie to me and to yourself?"

The severity in his tone startled her.

"Oh!"

He went on, more gently, but not inclined to spare her a wholesome truth or two.

"How can you face life if you are insincere? And that pitiful little air of authority—because, forsooth, you still have the money you married for! Fie, for shame! That is *not* your definition of life. Did I not tell you that I am a poet? Do you think a poet means only a writer of rhymes? The poet is one who sees God walking wherever there is a foothold of earth! What is your poor little mask to me? It is shaped like a dollar-sign and I can see your eyes—and nose—through it. Yes, and more: your heart. And I tell you that your place is not here. Every hour that you lurk here in the shadows, you cheat yourself of life."

"Why do you say such things to me?" She was perturbed to the point of resistance. "You—a vagabond—and outcast! This is my life."

"Why do you throw *vagabond* in my teeth, eh?"

"From scorn!"

"From envy. You envy me because I have dared to be a vagabond. I had my choice once—as you had yours. I could have forsworn my liberty and my poetry and—written the usual magazine trash. Oh, yes, I had an 'opening,' as they call it, into the world of spurious literature. But, oh, how quickly I shut up that opening! I could also have taught nice young lads to say *S'il vous plaît, madame*—or

La donna è mobile—and *Nein, das will Ich nicht machen!* Not me. I have been ridiculed, condemned. I have known poverty and hunger—and despair. But let me tell you, when men cast me out, God received me. Earth took me to her infinite embrace. She has fed me even in her deserts. She has sheltered me among her hills. She has made me little brother to her rains and her winds. And my despair—do you know what she has done to that? She has taught me to make songs of it! And you—poor coward—how you envy me!"

"Stop," she commanded, hotly. "How dare you compare me with . . ."

"With a vagabond? Because you are *like* me. Yes, you are! You hate the shams as I do. You long for a real life, for a true love—just the emotions and passions of common earth."

"Be silent."

He pursued his advantage relentlessly.

"Underneath that air of Madam Rich-and-Haughty, you are as romantic as a schoolgirl, you who think you are cold and shallow! You, who . . . Are you crying?" She had dropped into her nook of the settee, with her face hidden on her arm. He went to her.

"I—I—oh, you are very cruel."

"Yes. It *is* torture, to really see oneself." She resisted this, feebly.

"Oh, no—I'm not like that. Why should you think . . . ?"

"Because I have read your heart in a book." He lifted the volume. "How you are longing for love—for a common, warm, human love. If some man, no matter who or what he was, came to you—if even a vagabond were to forget 'the queen' and throw himself boldly at your feet—you would 'stoop and kiss him with your soul.'"

She turned her face up to him, then hid her eyes again from the look in his—a look, searching and tender, that seemed to envelop her like a caress, and to deny the trivialities of station and degree and the opulent solidity of the Mearely house. It spoke from the life in him to the life in her, with promise. He leaned over, near her, but not touching her. "Who could have comprehended?" he whispered, wondering at his own emotion for her, but accepting it with the same faith and reverence with which he accepted sunrise, the falling of a star, or the fragrance of the beneficent pines.

She looked up again and no longer hid the need she felt.

"Oh, don't—don't just trifle with me! You are the only man who has ever understood: the only man who has ever . . ." She could not go on, but her eyes and quivering mouth mutely besought him to say what she longed to hear.

"Who has ever loved you?"

The tears filled her eyes again.

"Since you're only a—a vagabond, and I don't know you—and you will go away like—like a make-believe prince—it couldn't be very wrong for you to say you love me—just once? I'll never have anything *real*, so can't we just pretend?"

"Just pretend—you think? No. It couldn't be very wrong for you to hear me say just once that I love you. Only don't repent to-morrow that you heard love to-night from the lips of a vagabond."

"Love will never come again," sadly.

"I tell you it will. The very same love will come—not as a vagabond in the night, but a love that you can accept."

"Will it really come again?" wistfully.

"Yes. Now—good-night and good-bye."

"Good-bye?" blankly. "You are going now? Oh—where?"

He picked up his hat and smoothed its pheasant's feather, while he smiled at her and said, mysteriously:

"Who knows? On through the woods, over the hills. Autumn is coming, and the vagabond takes the road again."

She went to him and put her hand in his. So, hand in hand, they walked toward the veran.

"I shall never forget you."

"That is good," he said. He stopped her as she was stepping out on the verandah. "Wait. Go back. There is too much light behind you. Who knows what curious eyes may lurk in the darkness below?" He leaped back nimbly and turned off the light from the tall lamp. Pointing to the valley and the river flooded with moonlight, he said, "See how my golden path winds before me. Now, I leave you." With another nimble movement he had climbed to the railing.

"Oh—not that way," she urged.

"It's a quick way. A leap, and I am in the road below. Farewell, Rosamond Mearely. Till love comes again, my merely Rosamond, say good-night, and wish me well."

"Good-night! I—I do not know your name!"

"A vagabond has no name." he answered. He bent and swiftly kissed the hand still trying to hold him, unclasped its fingers, and jumped to the road.

"Good-bye forever and ever, my vagabond." Rosamond tried to call the words to him, but a sob stopped them.

"Here!" "There!" "Get him!" Two rough voices shouted from below, and there was the noise of tramping feet.

"Nay, nay! Good-night to you!" the vagabond called; his voice sounded as if he were running.

"Hey! he's off!" One of the rough voices roared.

"Halt!" A shot snapped through the air, followed quickly by another.

Rosamond stood motionless, stupefied by terror.

"I winged him," she heard the same voice say. Then she threw off the spell in which fear had gripped her and rushed out into the garden and down the drive, calling wildly. Guns were as little known in Roseborough as tramps. She had no idea what she should find in the road, or who the men were who had shot at her vagabond and perhaps killed him. No thought of danger to herself crossed her mind. She dashed on recklessly, crying:

"Vagabond! My vagabond! Answer me!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE first sound she heard was a horse's trotting as some one rode away down the hill. There was a jumble of interjections, groans, and arguments, amid which she distinguished her vagabond's voice. He was at least not slain! She sent up a swift prayer of grateful joy, and called him again. He replied with a guarded question.

"Who's calling?"

"I—I," she answered. "What is it?"

"An accident. Nobody hurt."

Following the direction of his voice, she came upon him seated on a stone, with another man standing beside him. He addressed her formally.

"Madam, do not be alarmed. There has been an accident. This gentleman is a constable. He was—er—under the impression that he ought to shoot me, and did so without waiting for explanations."

"Oh, dear—oh . . ."

He interrupted again, as quickly as he could get his breath.

"I presume the shots wakened you, or, if you were not asleep, alarmed you. It was most charitable of you to run to the assistance of the wounded."

"Wounded!"

"Slightly. One favour only—let me ask. May we come in for a moment and find out the extent of the damage? I am sure the officer will assist in binding up the wounds he has made. We will trouble you for only a few moments."

She understood that she was to moderate her anxiety. Her vagabond did not mean to let their former acquaintance be known to the village sleuth who might gossip it about the valley.

"Can the constable carry you in?"

"*No*, ma'am! nor hi wouldn't *try* it!" came out of the night, with indignant emphasis and a cockney accent as thick as the darkness.

"No need, officer. It's my shoulder that is hit. If I may come in . . ."

"Hi might as well tell yer that, w'erever you go, *Hi* goes with yer, as Ruth she says to Nay-homy in the Scriptur'; cos w'y? Cos you're hunder arrest, that's w'y."

"Thank you for the explanation. I might have thought you were following me from sheer affection."

"Oh, don't jest!" Rosamond pleaded. "It may be dreadfully serious. I will run in ahead and find some linen to make bandages—and telephone for the doctor." She ran up the road toward her gate, not heeding his protests against the doctor.

Dr. Wells's office- and horse-boy, Peter, answered

the telephone almost immediately. He slept in the office downstairs for that purpose. Dr. Wells was wont to say that while Peter never *woke* up, when the bell rang, he always *got* up and took the name fairly correctly, stumbled to his master's door and repeated it, and then, after harnessing the horse, rolled back to bed without knowing that he had been up. When vagabond and constable entered Villa Rose, Peter was even then rapping on the doctor's chamber door and saying the name of "Mearely."

Rosamond scurried hither and thither producing soft linen and lotions, safety pins and needle and thread, cotton batting and smelling salts, until the end of the big table looked like a peep into a hospital. To all protests she answered:

"Don't talk! Don't talk! Save your strength."

The ball had furrowed the fleshy part of his left arm just below the shoulder. Rosamond was obliged to remove his coat, cut the sleeve of his shirt, and bathe and dress the wound herself without assistance from the constable. That worthy stood by, twirling a battered straw hat and staring open-eyed and open-mouthed at the contents of the living room. He refused point blank to take any surgical responsibility.

'Hi'm a constable, and Hi ain't no bloomin' doctor. Hi drills 'oles in yer; Hi don't stop 'em hup again," was his pithy and definite retort, when besought to put the pins in the bandage while Mrs.

Mearely held it secure. In the end she was obliged to tie it, achieving quite a pretty bow-knot which she spread out daintily and patted into place, feeling a natural pride in it which she was not inclined to conceal.

While refusing to put a finger to the business, himself, the constable was willing to make remarks and to offer criticisms, such as:

"Hi've 'eard of gangrene a-settin' in hafter a shot. Hi shouldn't be surprised if 'e'd take to gangrene, 'im bein' of that dark, bilious complexion. A dark-skinned man is bound to be a bilious man. Hi never knowed it to fail."

Or:

"If Hi'd ben doin' the job, Hi'd 'ave done it very different. But hit's not my place to nuss. Wot's your name ('nyme' he called it), by the w'y?"

"Mrs. Mearely." shortly. She already detested that constable.

He was a broad, slow person of forty or more, with a dragging walk that, at first sight, seemed to be lameness; but save for self-importance and a weary disgust at the world, his limbs were whole. His head was as large as the average headstone, and of somewhat the same shape; and though it was not of the same material, it was thicker and looked as hard. He wore a gray linen duster, soiled and much crumpled, from which he occasionally filliped bits of dried

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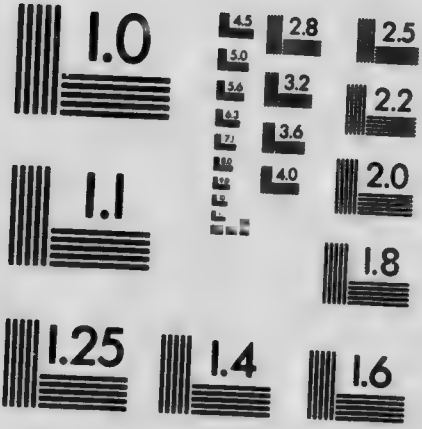

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mud with his thumb nail. He spoke in the deliberate, very positive accents of a man who knows he has never made a mistake of any kind, even by accident, in all his life. He forbore to argue with Mrs. Mearely when she accused him of a callous soul, anent the bandaging. He simply put back the flap of his duster and polished his badge with his cuff. The inference was plain. She might *have* riches; but he *was* the *Law*.

"Why doesn't Dr. Wells come? I am so frightened about you!" She burst out presently, after the Law had expressed more of his uncomforting views.

"But it's nothing," the victim protested.

"Oh, yes it is—it *is!* It's a dreadful wound. It—it bled!"

"It's only a graze on the shoulder. You have done everything needful."

"Oh, no—I don't know how to attend to it *properly*. If *only* the doctor would come! Don't they c-cauterize—wounds?" She stammered over the word, as she was not sure of it. "I—I—think I've read of that. And sew them up with silk?—to—to prevent people from bleeding to death?"

Her eyes were big and tearful with alarm.

"Please don't be so troubled. It is only a trifle. You need not have sent for the doctor at all." He turned his head to hide the flicker of amusement which he could not restrain.

"Oh, don't talk!" she urged. "You haven't the strength to waste Ought I to telephone again? Oh, dear! Dr. Wells's boy is so stupid. Perhaps he hasn't told the doctor the right name—sent him off somewhere else. And—and—you'll bleed to death before he—he—comes to sew you up with silk." She wept.

"No—no, dear lady. Don't be distressed. I'm all right."

"Aw! 'E'll do, I guess. Nuthin' more'n a scratch; but wot a goin'-on habout it!" The constable was disgusted.

Rosamond turned on him, angrily.

"What do *you* know about it? It is all your fault! You might have *killed* him!"

This had far from the desired effect.

The constable replied proudly, looking from one to the other for admiration:

"Hif it was my juty Hi'd 'ave *'ad* ter kill 'im." He put the straw hat on his head with an air.

"Duty! How dare you shoot a man just because you see him alone on the road at night!"

"Yes, ma'am. But, you see, ma'am, constable Gardner and me, we was sent out to-night to look for a tramp. That's hon account of some busybody thinkin' they seen 'im 'ereabouts this very hevenin'. So they tells the chief, and 'e sends us, me an' Gardner,—my nyme bein' Marks, Halfred Marks,

Halfred Marks" (he touched his hat-brim to each in turn). "An' so we comes beatin' hit along hup the valley. An' w'en Hi seen 'im on the porch . . ."

Rosamond made an exclamation of alarm.

"You—you saw . . . ?"

"Be careful," her patient whispered.

"Yes, ma'am. I seen 'im standin' on the railin' as I come up the road. And, considerin' the time o' night, hit looked queer—*to me*." His expression defied them to criticise his angle of vision.

"Why—why . . ." Mrs. Mearely began, feeling for words that eluded her. The vagabond came to her aid.

"Naturally—naturally—sergeant . . ."

The Law's regard became more affable

"Hi hain't the sergeant, sir—thankin' you kindly jest the same. Seein' a man on the railin' at that time o' night . . ."

She interrupted, nervously:

"It couldn't have been so very late . . ."

"Sh!" came the warning from behind her.

Slowly and laboriously, Mr. Marks took from his pocket a large, open-faced silver watch, attached to a short loop and bow of bright, cherry-coloured ribbon.

"Three-twelve; nigh on three-fifteen," he said, after a prolonged examination.

"But it was not three, *then!*"

"Hi didn't say *three*, ma'am. Hi said three-twelve. Three-thirteen it is now, bein' as time an' tide waits for no man. Must a'ben two-thirty, any'ow—nearer two forty-five." Preparing to return the watch to his pocket, he noticed the other man gazing at its cherry bow. "Hi see you're hadmirin' of *this*. It's one of Mrs. Marks's 'appy touches. She 'as a good bit of sentiment, Mrs. Marks 'as—on haccount of marryin' *late* in life. Hi recommends Mrs. Marks as a wife; or hany spinster that's standin', so to speak, hon the doorsill of the lonesome forties, for, w'en they *gets* took up by a man, they're very grateful an' supine. So as Hi was sayin', seein' 'im on the railin' at that time of night, Hi thought Hi'd see wot was hup!"

"Naturally, officer: of course."

"So Hi starts hup the bank with Gardner; an' jest then—bump!—the feller jumps an' lands on my 'ead, and we goes down a-rollin' into the road, with Gardner hafter us. Gardner, 'e picks 'isself hup an' 'oofs it for the station, never carin' for me; but that's hall reg'lar, 'cause *'e* goes hoff juty at two-thirty. That's 'ow Hi knowed wot time it wos—haccount of Gardner leavin' me in the ditch an' 'oofin' it for the station. Hi'd jest come *hon* juty; so Hi 'as to pick myself hup—an' make it 'ot for *'im*," indicating the wounded man in the chair. "So Hi spits hout a mouthful of sand-pebbles back

hon to the road (where they'd houghter of stayed hin the first place) an' I *yells* at 'im: ''Alt!' says Hi. But off 'e goes," His wooden face took on an aggrieved look like a boy's when left b .ind in a race.

Rosamond exclaimed angrily:

"You should have let him go. You had no right to shoot!"

"Hi'll shoot hany man wot jumps on my 'ead—'specially *at that time o' night!*" He spoke as one positively within his rights. " 'Ow was Hi to know 'e was your 'usband, ma'am?"

"My—my . . .?" she gasped.

" 'Specially as hit was in the dark. But hi wouldn't a-knowed if hit 'ad ben in the light. Now, if you'll give me the nyme, ma'am, Hi'll be hoff and make my report to the chief." He brought a large tablet notebook and pencil out of his pocket. Rosamond looked at the vagabond, her face blank with dismay.

"Report? Oh-h—you mustn't . . ."

"You needn't report this, officer,"—quickly coming to her rescue—"I have no complaint to make. It was purely an accident."

"Oh yes! *purely* an accident; not of the *least* importance!" she emphasized, snatching gratefully at the straw.

"Thank you kindly, ma'am. Hi'll take his nyme jes' the syme, as a matter of juty."

There was a pause in which two disconcerted persons faced each other with perplexed looks.

"Certainly—certainly—er—but I am not this lady's husband . . ."

"Then—wot is she makin' such a goin' hon habout yer for?" severely.

"Well—I—er—I'm—her chauffeur."

"Yes!" she echoed, almost sobbing in her relief. "Yes! he's the chauffeur."

The impromptu motorist continued:

"You see—er—there was a party this evening and I drove some of the guests home—er—I had just returned. So—er—that was how it happened I was so late—two-forty-five I think you said, by the cherry-ripe timepiece."

"Yes! that was it," Rosamond assisted cheerfully. Her chauffeur! Wonderful vagabond! How cleverly he had extricated her from a problem which, in Roseborough, could have had but one—and that a fatal—termination.

"Wot Hi'd like to know is, w'y was you standin' on the porch railin' w'en Hi was comin' hup the road?' Mr. Marks, it appeared, had an unfortunate memory for details.

"Oh, that?" with a *dégagé* air. "When you were coming up the road?—er—. Was *that* what I heard? I was in here to—er—to get a bite of supper—see, there are the plates on the table—

when—hist!—I heard something—something suspicious. I listened." He paused dramatically. Marks nodded, all agog. "Er—it was a *noise!*" He felt his inventive powers weakening. Marks nodded again, wisely.

"'Earin' a noise is wot makes hany man suspicious."

"Er—I thought it might be a tramp. So I climbed on the railing—er—to see better. I thought I saw a man—a tramp—climbing up the bank. So—of course—I jumped on him!" His manner declared that to leap from a high rail down upon the heads of tramps, was a tenet he had held from childhood.

"W'en you saw hit were a horfcer of the law—w'y didn't you 'alt w'en Hi *said* 'alt?"

"Oh—that?" casually; he considered: "Well, you see, I was so frightened when I saw that I had apparently attacked a constable—I lost my head and . . ."

"You nearly lost *me my* 'ead—a-jumpin' on it like a fancy 'igh diver on a rollin' wave." He accosted Rosamond, formally, pointing his pencil at her. "And your nyme's 'Mearely,' you say, ma'am? Hi'd oughter know but Hi hain't been on the county force more'n three years an' it takes me a whiles to get hacquainted. My motto, as Hi says hit to myself a 'undred times a day, is 'Slow and careful, Halfred.' '*Mrs.* Mearely,' you said?"

"Yes, Mrs. Mearely. Hawthorne Road."

He bit his pencil carefully and indited.

"Hi knows the *road* hall right—an' hafter this Hi'll *stick* to it—if hall the King's 'orses an' hall the King's men is a-standin' on the porch railin'. Let 'em stand there, Hi say. And see 'ow they like it! Good-night, ma'am." He put away his note book and pencil and started slowly toward the door. The vagabond waved him a pleasant farewell.

"There'll be no complaint from me. Good-night sergeant."

Mr. Marks retraced his few deliberate steps.

"Hi hain't the sergeant, thankin' you kindly. Hi ought to be. But to *hought* hain't to is—as Hi tells Mrs. Marks—she bein' hambitious. Beggin' your pardon, there's a little matter Hi'd like to arsk your hadvice about. An' that his: Might you 'ave 'ad a confederate houtside?" He gestured with his thumb.

"A confederate?" in surprise.

"No. Hi suppose not" disappointedly. "You bein' the shoofer, Hi couldn't say wot you'd want of a confederate. But Hi could a-swore Hi saw a 'eavy-set lookin' man hon the 'illside habove me w'en Hi started hup to inquire wot you was doin' hon that there railin'. That's wot I fired the second shot for, w'en I got hup f om hunder your boots. But my eyes not bein' the best, Hi couldn't swear hif it was

a man hor a strayed cow, hor a juniper bush. But Hi took a pot shot at wot Hi *thought* it was; and hit seemed to me like Hi 'eard a groan. Hit might 'ave been a cow. Did you groan?"

"Moo—oo. Like that?"

Marks studied the sound.

"Hi carn't say Hi reco'nize hit. Hi do wish Hi was a better 'and at 'ittin wot Hi shoots at. That's halways *been* a failin' o' mine. Look, in your hown case—just a *bit* of a *scratch*, that's hall—and me a-'oldin' on to your cow-tails at the time. It'ud *count* for a *miss*. Hit's very 'umiliatin' to a hofcer. At that, it might 'ave been a juniper bush. Good-night, sir."

He surveyed his victim from the doorway in a peevish fashion and muttered:

"Hi do wish my aim was better. Hi do wish that."

"Oh, *good-night!*" Rosamond cried in uncontrollable exasperation.

Constable Marks took out his watch.

"Good-*mornin'*, *Hi* should say." Without undue haste he put his watch away, touched his hat, first to one, then to the other, and moved off along the verandah.

"Thank heaven he's gone! Oh Vagabond, I wish the doctor would come! If only Blake were here to help you to bed."

The vagabond was on his feet, rocking in a gale of

laughter which only main force had silenced until the constable's exit.

"I'm not going to bed! For a bit of a scratch like this? Besides, I might miss something. Oh, human nature! How rich it is, how glorious!"

"Oh! don't laugh like that. It exerts you too much. You must be so weak." She tried to induce him to sit down again among the pillows of the arm-chair.

"I'm not weak!"—he denied the charge as if it affronted him—"only perishing for a drink of water."

"There is ice-water in the cooler on the dining-room table. I'll bring you a glass." She was flitting away to get it, but he intercepted her.

"Indeed, you shall not! You must not wait on me any more. I'm neither a cripple—nor royalty. Oh, by the way"—he closed the dining room door again and came back to her—"Who is Blake? You mentioned a Blake just now."

"He's the coachman. Why?"

He laughed

"You are sure he's not the chauffeur?"

"No," she smiled.

"To think I should have to be a chauffeur after all!" He threw out his hands with the surrendering gesture of one who has ceased to defy destiny. "Didn't I tell you society's greatest need was chauffeurs? See how I arose, instinctively, to meet

the demand. Your chauffeur, madam—I mean ma'am."

"It is *so* lucky that you thought of that!" she replied; then they both laughed again, in delight, as well as mirth, because they shared so entertaining a secret unknown to all the world.

"But I warn you, never let me drive your automobile if you value your life. I am a chauffeur in name only."

"Never fear," she answered gaily. "I don't require your services. I have no automobile—except a little electric; and I drive that myself."

"Wise woman! If you could only drive your 'little electric' of life as cleverly!"

She tossed her head, spiritedly.

"I've never had an accident!"

He challenged this.

"Because you never turn any other roads than the smooth paths of Mrs. Mearely's walled enclosure—where there are no fascinating dangers. At least, not for *you*."

Though she smiled, her answer was only half humorous.

"But what happens to people who try to escape from the safe enclosures?—Those, I mean, who won't live the way others want them to?"

"Ah!" he cried. "They make one glorious blind leap for freedom . . ."

"And land on—'the 'ead of the Law,'" she retorted.

"*Break* its head! The sooner the better" smilingly.

"They can't," she replied, gravely though the light his coming had put into her eyes, like new candles, was still there. "The law is too strong. It brings them back again—wounded!" She pointed to the bandage.

When he answered, there was a defiant ring in his voice that was not all pretence. All his gypsying past was calling to him to guard himself against the unconscious power of the little lady of the museum whose shining eyes told so frankly that her heart had set out on the great search.

"A pin-scratch on the skin of my shoulder! That's all that the talons of social law have been able to do to *this* vagabond. I go to drink to liberty—and the open road—in a bumper of ice-water."

He departed with a dramatic flourish. As the door closed behind him, Rosamond indulged in a long, delicious sigh, thinking what a marvellous end her Wonderful Day was coming to, and slipped into the big chair he had vacated. On the stand just beside the chair, which was placed close to the end of the settee, the bowl and linen strips were still in view. She rose and gathered them up. The bowl still held some water. She ran to the verandah rail

and emptied it. Seeing a towel, another sponge and a roll of batting on the big table, she picked up these various items, and patted them into the bowl preparatory to putting them safely out of sight until the doctor should arrive and perhaps need them.

CHAPTER XX

SUDDENLY she started, in alarm, and ran to the dining room door. She had heard a loud groan. Even while she reached to turn the handle she heard it again; but not from the direction of the dining room. If sound indicated truly, there was someone outside—someone in distress. Immediately, she heard a heavy tread on the verandah and a large swarthy, black-whiskered man in black clothes limped upon her horizon. She emitted a pathetic little moan of fright, turned pale and dropped everything but the bowl. Her fingers clung to that, mechanically.

The intruder removed his hat, and bowed very low.

"*Guten Morgen, meine Dame. Verstehen Sie?*"

"Oh—oh!" She breathed out her interjections as a sort of windy, wordless prayer to be spared more excitement even on her Wonderful Day. Until this day nothing had ever happened in Roseborough. Now, too much was happening. The swarthy man bowed again profoundly.

"*J'espère que je ne vous dérange pas, madame. Comprenez-vous?*"

"Oh—h! What is he saying?" Then, losing the

last remnants of her poise she waved him off wildly, chattering: "I don't wish any, thank you. No, I don't want anything to-day. Oh—h! go-o away."

He was unmoved by her explosion. Bowing again, he said:

"Ah, you speak the English. I cannot complain. It is your language. I also speak it perfectly—as you hear."

She did not venture to inform him that his accent was execrable. She only stared, and her pale lips silently shaped the words "go away."

"I speak it perfectly, but I detest it. The whole world must speak their abominable language because they will not learn any other. Even the Irish must learn English before they can curse it for sympathy. I detest the English. When I meet a stranger, I address him first in German; next"—he enumerated them rapidly—"in the French, Italian, Spanish, Russ, Magyar, Turkish and the Chinese. Then if he will not . . ."—with a shrug—"I condescend to speak the English—but always against my will. I detest the English."

If Rosamond thought at all during this address, she must have thought the man mad. She was afraid to speak or move; she stared, hoping perhaps to conquer the maniac, if such he were, by the power of her fixed eye.

"Ah!—*pardon.*" He gave the word the French

pronunciation; and stooping painfully, picked up the towel and handed it to her. Since she did not take it, he draped it over her arm, seemingly unaware that she backed away from him.

"*Pardon.*" He picked up the two sponges, one in each hand, and put them into the bowl. "*Pardon,*" and the roll of batting followed the sponges. "*Pardon,*" and "*pardon,*' et cetera, and one by one the linen strips were hung over the towel on her arm. Then he withdrew a few steps and bowed.

"What—what are you doing here?" She managed to ask at length. "Who are you?"

"Madam, my mission in your detestable country, for a few hours longer, is a secret. But my name I disclose: it is to comfort your alarms. How can one better comfort the alarms than to introduce to you Teodor Carl Peter Lassanavatiewicz, of the diplomatic secret service of Woodseweedsetisky? I have been wounded in that service. Not my word alone, but my murdered leg, introduces me to you as a patriot."

"Wounded?" she repeated automatically.

"*Ja, meine Dame.* I have been execrably, abominably wounded in the leg. My secret business—and, believe, it is of a most international importance—has brought me to your country. I can explain no more. I am a believer not in the discretion of woman." He bowed.

"What are you doing in my garden?" She demanded with an effort to master her fears.

He bowed.

"*Bitte.* That is the concern of my secret business. I wish to meet a certain person very quietly, and induce that person to return with me very quietly—to—shall I say?—yes?—his family? Yes. I wish to take a certain great person home. Why I now make myself known to you, that I will explain. In the peaceful and very secret pursuit of my duties, I have been perceived by a lady of some age and much excitement, who screams like a parrot because she sees me looking, very gently, over your balcony. I wish to give no alarms. Therefore I look no more over your balcony. Instead, I hide in the river-grass till the guests have departed and the lights you have put out. Then I return. But it becomes unsafe in your garden. There are bandits. I have been shot in the leg. *Donnerwetter!* I have been *detestably* shot in the leg! Therefore, I make myself known and request your permission to continue to watch, in the road below your garden, for the arrival of a certain person—without attacks from bandits. I will sit upon a stone under the cypress trees. I will alarm no one. I request only that I be no more attacked."

"Oh yes! oh, please go now. No one will attack you."

He bowed again, twice.

"*Grazia, grazia, signora.* It is most important that my business remain secret. Be at ease. You, also, are safe while Teodor Carl Peter Lassanavatiewicz is in your garden. Comfort your alarms. I request it as a charity, madam,—will you of your goodness give me of the linen, with which you have doubtless tended the wounds of the man of your household, who has been attacked by the violent savages who infest this road. I heard the terrible battle in the darkness. I tried to escape. Psst! *I* was shot!"

Holding out her arm on which he had hung the strips, and keeping herself literally 'at arm's length' from his touch, she indicated that he was to help himself, He took three pieces, bowed after each taking, and thanked her in three languages.

"*Danke schön. Grazia. Je vous remercie mille fois, madame.*" Then, with an expression and gesture of dislike, he added, "But I forget! you speak only this desolating and dolorific English—which I detest. *Adios.* Farewell." On the verandah, he paused. "When my secret business is accomplished, I rejoice to return to Europe and my own country, where there are no dangers to the distinguished official high in the secret police. I give a gold coin to the brigands of Poland or to the anarchists of our Balkans. '*¿De dónde bueno? Si, Señor.*' So it is happily

arranged. Here, no! They wait not for 'good-evening.' They *shoot*—in the *leg! Donnerwetter!* I, who have fought close to all the rebellions in Woodseweedsetisky without a match-burn, I have here been execrably wounded in the leg. It is insult!" His voice trembled and tears of humiliation wetted his cheeks. Drawing himself up, he put on his hat and gestured to her with the formality of a military salute. "*Je vous rends grâces, madame.*" He limped out, with groans that grew fainter as he progressed into the garden.

Mrs. Mearely stared after him, still in doubt that he had really occurred. She tiptoed, fearfully, to the door and peeped out, to satisfy herself that he was not loitering on her verandah. What had he said in explanation of his presence? She tried to recall his words, but remembered only the phrases about taking a certain great person home, diplomatic service of some country, or city, hitherto unheard of, and that he had looked over the balcony before and been screamed at by a lady of some age and much excitement. So it was he and not the vagabond who had looked over her balcony, alarming Mrs. Witherby. Then who was the vagabond and why had *he* also come to Villa Rose? Was there any connection between the two? Were they both dark and secret "gentlemen burglars," about to strip Villa Rose of all its antiques? She rejected this

suspicion firmly, as soon as it rose. Romance forbade it.

In putting the bowl back on the stand she knocked off the *Digest* and the Browning. Automatically, she picked them up. The caption "A Runaway Prince" caught her eye and held it. Gradually her expression changed. The colour burned in her cheeks again, as the thrill of amazement and excitement palpitated through her. She scanned the article feverishly, muttering snatches of it aloud.

"'The Runaway Prince! Secret search through Europe, Britain, and America.' The Prince is 'eccentric, romantic, artistic, a connoisseur.'—Of course! He picked out the Turner at once! and the Buddha! Oh, can it be . . . ?" She consulted the paper again. "'The prince is fond of entering, incognito, the homes of humble folk—frequently attired like a vagabond.'" The paper fell from her hand. "'Fond of entering the homes'—'secret search'—'to bring a certain great person home'—? Oh, it *is*—it *is* the prince! A prince has come to me, on my Wonderful Day!"

CHAPTER XXI

A VOICE broke in upon her blissful musings, in a strain both matter-of-fact and gently reproachful.

"You never gave me any jelly. I found one out there; it was delicious. Also a truly amazing cake. I think I may deduce from the state of my appetite that I forgot to eat a dinner to-night. Yes, I remember now. I wrote a poem instead. All but the last verse. That didn't seem to come. So I wound up with coffee and cheese."

The Incognito sauntered in from the dining room with a comforted look on his countenance.

"That farther compartment of your museum, the kitchen, seemed familiar. I was led to explore it. I do not despise kitchens—nor pantries. I have a fancy for them. Nothing delights me like entering a pantry—unobserved."

Noting Mrs. Mearely's absorbed gaze, he became self-conscious. He looked at her; then endeavoured, by looking directly from her eyes to his own person, to discern what it was that had inspired her fixed stare.

"Is anything the matter with me? I mean, anything more than usual?"

"Oh no, Your Hi——" She checked the reverent utterance quickly. "Oh—oh—no!"

"I thought, perhaps . . . Never mind. What I was about to tell you is, that I explored your pantry with better success than *you* did when you prepared my supper. You overlooked a cake fit for a prince—Eh? What? Oh, merely an exclamation? It is a miracle of beauty to look at—and, to eat! Who made it? I ask, because the cooker of that cake has the soul of an artist. I wish to spend my days in the shadow of her wing."

"I made it." She blushed, happily, under the royal praise.

"You? Put a raisin in your diadem, as its central jewel!"

"You will not mock at the 'museum' any more when I tell you that I found the recipe for that cake in an old parchment. The Countess of Mountjoye invented the cake first in 1715 for the Prince of Paradis: and history says she was the only one of his sweethearts who never lost his affection. So, you see, it was always a . . ." (she paused, changed the phrase she was about to use, namely, "a prince's cake" into) "a cake fit for a prince."

"And she never lost his affection? I can well believe it! For I feel tender toward her, even two hundred years later. But, since I cannot lay *my* royal heart at *her* feet, I consign it to that spot on the

rug just between your two silver-toed slippers. Ah!" he sighed.

"Are you feeling any pain now?" respectfully. He was vaguely conscious of a change in her manner but, being ignorant of the cause, attached no importance to it, as yet.

"From the cake? By no means!"

"From your wound." Her manner reproached him for his flippancy. Then she remembered that he did not know how close his would-be captor lay; and that, even if he were not wounded, it would be almost impossible for him to slip away from Villa Rose, to pursue his glad, free wanderings, unless perhaps she could devise some subtle disguise to aid him—even as the medieval ladies, in Hibbert Mearely's old books, passed their gentlemen, royal and otherwise, out of compromising situations.

"Oh none,—none" he answered. "I've forgotten I was ever at the wrong end of a gun."

She pushed the big chair toward him.

"Will you not sit down?"

"By no means. Allow me to place the chair for *you*." He laid hold of its other arm to push it toward her, and she resisted with all the etiquette at her command.

"Oh no!" she was shocked. "You must allow *me* to place it for *you*." He, in his turn, resisted as firmly.

"Because I am a poor, sick, helpless creature? Is that why you insist on waiting on me?" He had a sturdy masculine objection to this view of him. She blushed.

"Oh, no! That is not the reason."

The expression in her shining eyes contented him. He sank among the cushions; and, closing his hand over hers, drew her to the broad, square stool beside his chair.

"There! I will sit; and you shall sit beside me and tell me wherefore you have changed your ways with me—holding chairs for me and so forth."

The whimsical air left him. His black eyes grew grave. He was touched by the look of awe and wonder she turned up to him, and his feeling for her was deepening and taking possession of him.

"One waits on—princes," she said, with a little catch of her breath. He laughed softly.

"Oh, Madam Make-Believe! Will you crown the vagabond now and make a prince of him—thou cooker of prince's cakes? If I were a prince, do you know what my name would be? I'd be Prince Run-Away."

"Yes!" she cried. "Prince Run-Away!"

"There are several kinds of vagabonds, my dear; and neither palace nor cottage walls can hold them! Nor catch and cage them again, once they have escaped." Even as he said it, he knew that it

was less true, at that moment, than it had been before he entered the strange house and encountered the fairy princess in the museum.

"If he knew that his own Secret Service is lurking just outside, to snatch him back into his palace-prison!" she thought. Aloud she said, timidly:

"But there's the law."

"What law is there that can't be broken?" he demanded.

"Don't you know," she answered, "that there *is* a law that can't be broken? It was made for us, by something stronger than we are; and it says that human beings must live together, in families and groups. Because the need of brotherhood is the strongest thing in them. And that *need* is the *law*. Have you never felt it, Prince Run-Away?"

He looked at her in silence for a moment. Then he said, seriously:

"There is always need of love—true love. But there is so much counterfeit love in the world, Rosamond. To pass all the little waving false hands safely—losing no grain of faith, nor drop of tenderness by the way—and come, at last, and fold your heart's wings softly in two tender, loyal hands, which will never weary and never unclasp——"

She surrendered her hands, willingly. It would be something sweet to remember all her life, how a prince had held them tenderly.

"Do you know—in the twilight, as I came along through the rushes of the river-path—I made a little poem to you? I did not know it was to you."

He drew a small note book from one of his pockets, and turned its pages.

"There it is, you see—all zigzagged across the paper—like the little zigzag path in the dusk. But both came straight to you."

"Oh! is this your book of poems?" eagerly.

"It is *one* of them. I have others. Six, to be exact. Two are with a friend in St. Petersburg. He is translating them. One is in my hut. Another is in London, where it will soon be published. And the best—the first, the youngest, and dearest—the one I'm proudest of—is buried in a biscuit tin in Idaho."

"Oh!" she cried, thrilled. "To think you've wandered through all those places—Prince Run-Away."

"To come at last to *you*—Madam Make-Believe."

He looked at her so long that her lashes drooped and her colour came and went.

"Read it to me—my poem"—she said softly, and leaned over the manuscript. Her hair touched his cheek, as he also leaned over to descry the words he had pencilled in the dark.

"If I were a ship on the deep seas flowing,
If I were a ship on the waters blue,

I'd go sailing round t' world of women
To the harbour lights and the ports of You.

"If I were a cloud in the high air blowing,
If I were a cloud in the sapphire skies,
Oh, I'd break my rest in the orbs of heaven,
To be the mist in your young, blue eyes.

"If I were the grass in the green earth growing,
If I were the grass where the wild flowers meet,
I would leave my peace in the morning meadows,
To deck life's road for your eager feet."

He ceased, and she looked up, wistfully.

"Isn't there any more? Oh, make it up!" she pleaded. "Make it up, now!" The book dropped back into the big pocket.

"Make it up now?" he echoed. He put his arm gently about her shoulders, as if he meant to say that he would not hold her against her wish. Then, hesitating, here and there, for the words, he went on:

"Oh, would I were Love—Love's true art knowing:
Would I were Love—I would wrap you round!
My faith for your home, and my songs for your wending,
And my heart, my heart, for your garden-ground."

Then, since love and youth must have their way, he kissed her; and found, with her, that her lips had waited for his. In that instant principalities and powers—his kingdom and her village—melted into

mist. There were no countries, no degrees, no secret service nor scandal-mongers, no differences of race and place: love had met with love.

They were recalled to Roseborough by the noise of wheels on the gravel drive. Rosamond sprang up in alarm.

"Someone coming here?" he queried. She stopped him.

"Don't go to the verandah. If you should be seen! Oh, hide!" She ran to the door. "Oh-h." It was a gasp of relief. "Of course; it is the doctor." She smiled. Her smile faded, however, instantly; and she interjected again.

"What's the matter now?" the prince asked.

"You can't tell Dr. Wells you are my chauffeur. He knows I haven't one!"

The doctor's footsteps were coming along the porch.

"Leave it to me," hastily. "I'll tell him something."

Dr. Wells, entering hurriedly, with his little black bag in his hand and neighbourly anxiety in his heart, encountered Mrs. Mearely on her threshold, and saw no farther. He was astounded.

"Mrs. Mearely!" he exclaimed. "You are able to be up?"

Rosamond was taken aback by this greeting, not understanding for the moment that the doctor had

come to her home under the impression that she herself was ill.

"Yes, certainly.—Oh, I see. But it is not I who need your services."

"Well, I *am glad* of that! My boy, Peter, who answered the telephone, said I must come to you at once. I feared you had been taken seriously ill. So I hastened, as fast as possible—considering that my own indigestion was acute. I delayed only to awaken Mrs. Wells, and tell her that I had received an urgent call to your home. Dear, dear! she was greatly alarmed. Indeed, she almost insisted on coming with me, knowing that you are alone. But I couldn't permit it. She was seized with such a fit of hiccoughs and heart-burn, poor thing, that I prevailed upon her to remain warmly in bed."

Even his capacious lungs needed refilling with air at times, so that his philippics must eventually come to a period. Rosamond had made several useless efforts to interrupt him; now she said quickly, to prevent him from launching another fleet of parentheses:

"How kind. But, as you see, I am perfectly well. It is this gentleman who requires your services." She led the way to the big chair, where the vagabond had settled again, perhaps because he thought that a wounded man should not appear too brisk, considering the hour and place.

"The accident . . ." she began.

"Accident?" Dr. Wells repeated. "Dear, dear. We have so few accidents, fortunately. Is it a fracture?"

"Accidental shooting, doctor," the prince informed him. "The wound is in the shoulder." He must have removed her bowknot bandage in the dining room, because it was no longer there when he slipped his coat off. Dr. Wells produced a huge pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, which he put on over his small gold-rimmed ones.

"Tst—tst—tst," he muttered, peering, first from one side, then from the other; "dear, dear. Yes, yes. It might very well have caused your death, if it had been in some other part of the body. Yes, indeed, not so slight as it appears, Mr.—" He paused, looking from one to the other, inquiringly. Thinking his tentative query had not been heard he repeated it, loudly, "Mr.——?"

"Er—Mr.——" Rosamond stammered, quickly. "Dr. Wells didn't quite catch your name."

"My name? Er—Mills. Yes. *Mr.* Mills. With *two* l's," he added; as though to prove the name his own, by showing that he could spell it; or, as inept liars always overdo matters, by adding a second fib to throw suspicion on the first. "I was passing along the road from Trenton. Some constables were out hunting a tramp who had alarmed the neighbourhood.

Some one shouted 'halt.' I supposed it was an attempted hold-up. So I spurred on; and got a bullet in my shoulder."

In the pleasant relief of this plausible tale, Mrs. Mearely embarked upon prevaricating ventures of her own.

"I—I had been sitting here reading, and just as I was—er—about to retire—I heard voices—and a shot. So—so—I ran out. And when I saw what had happened—er—I had Mr. Woods . . ."

"Mills," he corrected her, quickly, "with two l's."

"Mr. Mills—with two l's Thank you. I had Mr. Mills brought here. Then I sent for you."

The vagabond prince added another touch of realism to the fiction. He bowed formally, as if he had only now perceived that there was a lady present, and said:

"I shall never forget your kindness, Mrs.——?"

"Mrs. Mearely." She took the cue promptly and, imitating his method, painstakingly spelled the name out: "M-e-a-r-e-l-y."

"Mrs. Mearely," he repeated, and bowed again.

Even innocent-hearted Dr. Wells might have questioned the wherefore of this spelling bee, if he had not been wholly occupied with the contents of his bag.

"Now, if Dr. Wells will kindly patch me up so that I can set out on my way . . ."

"No, no! You daren't go on now." In spite of herself, her glance went to the verandah. Had the Secret Service come creeping up from the road again, to see that His Highness did not escape in the doctor's trap?

"Go on? To-night?" Dr. Wells shook his head. He never approved of rapid convalescence. "Oh, dear no. I couldn't advise it. Bed and rest, my dear sir; bed and rest, till the shock is abated. Yes."

"My sister's room is ready," Mrs. Mearely urged.

"Mrs. Mearely is kindness itself." The vagabond bowed again. "But I dare not lose the time. I am obliged to keep an appointment to-morrow. Important business."

"At least let me dress the wound properly—if we may use your sister's room for that purpose?"

"Certainly," Rosamond said quickly, silencing the protest she saw coming. "You must submit Mr. Wood—er—Mills. You know the way, doctor?"

She opened the door, at the right of the music room, where the stairs began their windings to the upper stories. The patient, supported by the doctor, and still protesting about his appointment elsewhere the next morning, mounted slowly. Rosamond waited to gather up her bowl, linen and sponges; then she closed the door behind her and ran up the stairs, to render aid in the bandaging, if necessary.

CHAPTER XXII

THE room to which the wounded gentleman was conducted, was at the back of the house looking toward the peak of the hill and over a corner of the orchard. Ordinary sounds from the road and the front of the house did not reach it.

Dr. Wells, washed, treated, and dressed the scratch, amid dissertations and reminiscences, while Rosamond assisted in the capacity of surgical nurse, and the patient stifled yawns and mirth and the desire to embrace the beautiful nurse; all three being blissfully unaware that there were anxious guests in the living room.

Mrs. Witherby, bearing all the marks of 'half-asleep,' sat in the big chair, looking about from door to door with barely suppressed excitement. Corinne stood near her, with gaping mouth and eyes, and a restless alarm that kept her standing, first on one foot, then on the other. Mrs. Witherby punched a cushion at her back, and said in a gusty whisper:

"I suppose we'd better sit down and wait till the nurse comes."

"Has she a nurse?" Corinne whispered back.

"Of course. Dr. Wells would see to that. I ex-

pect he brought Jane Hinch with him. He *always* foists Jane Hinch on his patients. *I* wouldn't have her in the house. I don't consider her efficient. The fact that she is Mrs. Wells's cousin is no recommendation to *me*."

"Mrs. Wells didn't seem to know what was the matter with Mrs. Mearely, did she?"

"How could she know till the doctor got here? How stupid you are, Corinne!"

"I'm so sleepy." The big, round eyes blinked.

"Well!" irritatedly. "Is your mother not sleepy too? I do think Mrs. Wells might have waited till morning to telephone. It always upsets me to be waked suddenly like that."

"But she knew Mrs. Mearely was alone. It must be dreadful to be ill and all alone."

"You needn't expatiate on it, Corinne," sharply. "She has only herself to thank for it. I did *my* best to prevent her from remaining here alone. But she was ridiculously obstinate about it. She even joined Dr. Wells and the rest of them, in jeering and snickering at my caution. Well, you see what has come of it. That tramp returned and half murdered her with fright. I hope she has learned her lesson."

"But, mamma, Mrs. Wells, said it was something she *ate*. At least, she thought it was."

"Humph!" her mother interrupted. Her tone

made "humph" a silencing argument to most opponents.

"Yes, mamma. Because, she said Dr. Wells himself had an attack of indigestion, when he came home; and he hardly ate anything—only some salad and a cheese sandwich."

Mrs. Witherby sniffed in a superior manner. This was a subject on which she had opinions.

"My dear. The Wellses have dyspepsia on the brain—as well as elsewhere. Ever since that cousin of Dr. Wells, Dr. Mayhew Pipp, in London, discovered his famous cure for dyspepsia, the Wellses have had nothing else, and talked of nothing else. If they aren't careful, they'll die of it, just like Dr. Pipp did. *I* say that dyspepsia is not a disease at all. It's a habit. Whenever my mother saw any of us looking yellow, she made us stick a feather down our throats—and that was the end of it. I will say, though, that I never tasted worse parsnip wine in my life. Such a slaughter of good parsnips. I had a *little* salad—and I thought it tasted very peculiar, now I come to think of it. Well—if it's ptomaine poisoning, there's probably very little hope for her."

Corinne, who had only partly persuaded herself that there was nothing in the tramp theory, found herself unprepared for the even more serious poison theory.

"Oh, mamma, don't!" she wailed.

"We may as well face the worst, Corinne. Because, until her sister can get back, we shall be obliged to stay here and oversee things. I shall, at least. It'll be my duty."

Corinne stiffened with fright.

"I wonder whether they've sent for Mrs. Barton," she whispered.

"I certainly *hope* so. Every moment counts in ptomaine poisoning."

Corinne recalled vaguely something she had read once about bodies turning blue from poison; she thought of beautiful Mrs. Mearely turning blue, and pleaded:

"But, mamma—it may *not* be ptomaine poisoning. Mrs. Wells didn't exactly know . . ."

Her mother sniffed again.

"Mrs. Wells never knows *anything*, my dear," Feeling Corinne's fingers in her hair presently, she snapped:

"What *are* you doing?"

"You left some of your curl-papers in. They look so funny. And your bonnet is crooked."

"I don't stop to think of my appearance when a friend needs my help. But *you* can laugh in the house of a dying woman you pretend to care for."

This was so unjust that Corinne burst into tears.

"She's *not* dying! I just love Mrs. Mearely. She shan't die," she cried, between her sobs; and threw herself face downward on the settee to w · in comfort. Her mother was not disturbed by the salt storm, but, on patting her hair and finding one curl-paper still there, she became furious.

"Corinne! stop that nonsense and fix my hair. What in the world are you crying about? Do be cheerful. Your mother has enough to bear."

Corinne, weeping heavily, dragged herself up from the settee and went to her parent. She removed the last paper spiral obediently and straightened the little turban, w ich had been sitting on its wearer's head at an impossible angle. Mrs. Witherby, meanwhile, pursued her own train of thought.

"I do hope she has made her will."

"She isn't going to die!"

"I wonder if Wilton Howard will inherit much. I wish, sometimes, we had made more of him. I dare say he's not a bad fellow at heart; but a man is very easily led astray by a silly girl. However, if he inherits any of Rosamond's money, it will put an end to *that* nonsense."

Corinne was so shocked by this allusion to her cousin's love-affair, which she herself felt to be a wonderful romance, that her tears ceased.

"You mean Mabel? Why, Mamma! I should think, if Mr. Howard ever gets any money, he'd *want*

to marry Mabel. I'm sure Mabel loves him terribly. I always wish she'd tell me about it. But she never does." She sighed.

Mrs. Witherby, furious at this sentimentality, slapped her daughter.

"Corinne! be quiet! Do you suppose I could afford to have Mabel leave me and marry? I need her. Who'd do the marketing and the errands, and see to your clothes? After my giving her a home, too. I hope she wouldn't be so selfish and ungrateful. Besides she wouldn't be a suitable match at all for a man with money. If Mr. Howard does inherit any of Rosamond's money, he will be obliged to make a fitting marriage. It will be his duty to all of us. Roseborough will expect it. Oh, you make me furious! You'd give Mabel everything you own, or that you *might* own, if your mother didn't watch you."

Subdued by her mother's hand and her torrents of talk, Corinne whispered:

"I wonder if he is upstairs? Do you think he could have got here before we did?"

"I don't know. He hadn't heard anything about it till I telephoned him. He has farther to come." Then she added—to herself, rather than to the daughter who seemed to have so little natural instinct for the main chance—"I wonder if he knows what she has left him in her will? Villa Rose, of course.

Well, I've always wanted to take hold of this room and make it . . ."

"Mamma! I hear wheels! It must be Mr. Howard."

Mrs. Witherby rose importantly and went to meet Howard, who came in swiftly, looking about him in apprehension.

"My *dear* Mr. Howard," she said, emotionally, taking his hand in both hers, "this is terribly sad for you."

"How is she?" he queried, in a sick-room whisper. She patted his hand.

"You must prepare yourself—we must all prepare ourselves. My dear, sensitive, tender-hearted Corinne is beside herself."

Corinne, feeling better now that her mother had discontinued her theories and prophecies, said cheerfully:

"We don't know anything. We haven't seen anybody yet. We've only just come. We hope it's all right."

Mrs. Witherby was annoyed.

"Corinne! how you interrupt! Oh, I fear it is very serious, Mr. Howard. The doctor is still with her. But of course, we hope . . ." She broke off and murmured sentimentally: "Ah well, we *always* hope—we *always* hope."

Howard's tone reflected hers.

"Yes, indeed. I can't understand it. Rosamond has always been the embodiment of health. For her to be struck down suddenly in this way . . ."

"Dreadful! But rely on me, Mr. Howard. I shall remain here and take charge of things, till her sister arrives."

"Mrs. Barton has been sent for?" he asked, quickly.

"We suppose so. But, in the excitement, it is possible no one has thought of it."

He appeared to think rapidly.

"It should be done at once. I hardly know how. It will have to be by telegraph in some way—because Mrs. Barton's mother has no telephone. Of course old Ruggle, of the telegraph office, is in bed, and the office closed. The office in Poplars Vale will be closed too . . ." He mused awhile. "Someone will have to get Ruggle up, and make him telegraph to the station agent at Trenton Waters, to send a man over to Poplars Vale, on horseback. Whom can we ask to wake Ruggle?"

"Oh, Mabel will go!" Corinne said. "She'll be sitting up all dressed. She wanted to come, but Mamma wouldn't let her." She ran to the door of the anteroom, where was the instrument which afflicted His Friggets. "I'll 'phone her." She closed the door, so that the bell should not be heard.

"If Mrs. Lee had a telephone, I'd have had *her*

here by now. But I'm certainly not going all that dark way to the cottage," Mrs. Witherby remarked, seating herself again. Howard had followed Corinne to the door to impress on her the details of the message she was to telephone. In returning, he arrived at the large table and, almost immediately, discovered the supper-tray.

"I see you have had something to eat," he said. "That was wise. You'll need all your strength."

Mrs. Witherby, in great excitement, joined him at the table.

"No! I haven't. I wonder who has been eating? Two persons evidently. How odd!"

After a pause, Howard suggested:

"The doctor and the nurse, perhaps."

"Well! It seems queer for Dr. Wells to sit down calmly and eat, when poor Rosamond is dying! Still, as I always say, it is amazing how much those dyspeptic people *can* eat, when there's no one by to see them stuff."

In moving the tray, she, in her turn, made a discovery; it was the pistol.

"Oh! Look! Oh! what does it mean?"

"What is it now, mamma?" Corinne asked, nervously, coming in at the moment. Howard picked up the weapon.

"Rosamond's pistol. That's strange."

"Is it loaded?" Mrs. Witherby asked.

"Yes, I expect so. No, it's not."

"Not loaded!"

"No. The chambers are empty."

She caught at his arm.

"Do you suppose she could have been attacked—fought wildly to protect herself—and then been overpowered?"

"No—no" he answered, not paying attention to her, but trying to recall whether his cousin had reloaded the pistol before putting it into her desk after their ride. He thought she had; therefore, the empty chambers puzzled him. Corinne was walking about, aimlessly, clasping and unclasping her hands.

"I feel as if—oh, I'll go crazy if something . . ." She caught hold of the big chair, and instantly screamed, "Look! Look! Blood on the chair!"

Her mother, with Howard close after her, rushed to the chair.

"Suicide!" Mrs. Witherby hissed dramatically. "Do you know of her secret sorrow? To think she may have been preparing to take her own life in the midst of all our gayety! Oh! Mr. Howard." She broke down, emotionally, grasping his shoulder to weep upon. "Oh! Mr. Howard, that is what comes of taking people out of their proper station. Our dear Rosamond was never quite one of us. Her mother—the butter—! She must have felt it her-

self—felt poignantly her inability to live up to her station among us. Oh Mr. Howard—oh—dear!"

Howard freed himself, rather ungently, and started toward the door opening on the stairs.

"I'm going up there," he said.

"Too late!" she cried, throwing her hands up over her head. "*She's killed herself!*"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE door opened and Dr. Wells entered. They rushed at him, all speaking at once.

"How is she?" Howard asked.

"Is she alive?" Corinne quavered.

"Is she *dead?*" her mother demanded.

"There, there, good people; one at a time. Yes. One at a time."

"Don't hum and haw!" Mrs. Witherby shrieked at him.

"Is the wound fatal?" Howard asked, more definitely this time.

"Fatal? Oh dear me, no. Oh no, certainly not. Only a flesh-wound. A mere trifle."

"A trifle?" Mrs. Witherby could not believe her ears.

"How did it happen?" Howard was trying to hasten the explanation by keeping rigidly to the point.

"Well—er—as nearly as I can make out—er—the constable—yes, it was the constable—mistook Mr.—er—*the man* for a tramp, and immediately fired."

"And nearly killed Mrs. Mearely?" Corinne's impatience broke bounds.

"Eh? What?" The doctor had removed his horn-rimmed glasses and was polishing them.

Howard, with a supreme effort, mastered his irritation.

"The bullet struck my cousin?—how?"

"Oh, dear me, no. Oh dear, no." He breathed on the lenses and rubbed them back and forth through a silk handkerchief. "Ah, I see. You also are under the impression that Mrs. Mearely is the invalid."

"Is she all right?" Corinne shook his arm.

"Oh quite, quite. Never better in her life, the sweet lady. Quite so. But—er—Mr.—er—Mills. Yes; Mills. Mr. Mills . . ."

"*Who* is Mr. Mills?" Mrs. Witherby almost screamed the question, in her unendurable exasperation.

"Oh, Mr. Mills is—er—well, I fear I can't tell you *who* he is, because I don't know. But his name is Mills—with two l's. Perhaps you know him? He was travelling along the road, and a constable, mistaking him for a tramp, shot at him—er—just outside Mrs. Mearely's house. She, with great courage, ran out to see what had happened—er—had the wounded gentleman brought in here and telephoned at once for me."

Mrs. Witherby, so far from being relieved, was indignant.

"But Mrs. Wells said," she began accusingly. . .

"Yes, yes, I know. Dyspepsia. So we thought—until I arrived. But I must hasten. I left Mrs. Wells feeling quite an invalid. Heartburn. Fortunately, we have a perfect cure for it. Our cousin, Dr. Mayhew Pipp's, remedy. You know, the poor fellow discovered an infallible cure a few years before he died of the disease. Very sad. No doubt he would have been knighted, had he lived. We feel very secure as long as we have cousin Mayhew Pipp's May-Piplets."

He swallowed a small pink pellet from a phial, snapped his bag to, and hurried out, saying "good-night" over his shoulder.

The three, looking blankly at one another, heard the trap drive away. Mrs. Witherby dropped into the big chair.

"Well! of *all* things!" she said. "What time is it?"

"I'm so relieved and happy I could shout!" Corinne exclaimed, laughing and crying a little at the same time.

"Yes, indeed," Howard agreed; "I cannot be thankful enough for poor Rosamond's safety."

Mrs. Witherby gave him an acid look, and sniffed.

"Yes! I dare say your gratitude is deep, Mr. Howard. As for me, I don't appreciate being dragged out of bed at three in the morning, and

frightened out of my senses, for any Mr. Mills I never saw in all my life."

"I'm sure the realization of your purely disinterested intention must compensate for the loss of your beauty-sleep, Mrs. Witherby." His manner was courteous, even courtly; yet, in some subtle way, he succeeded in implying that she was a meddler. She bristled.

"As I am not a relative of Mrs. Mearely's, I think *my* disinterestedness may be taken for granted, Mr. Howard. The sad occasion would not have benefited me."

Corinne, anxious to ward off strife, said hastily:

"Hadn't we better go, mamma? Mrs. Mearely won't need you to take charge of things now."

This fact, alas, was not soothing to a lady with Mrs. Witherby's passion for taking charge of things. She snapped:

"I know that without *your* telling me. Where on earth did you learn to be such a busybody? Of course, now I'm here, I shall wait to see Mrs. Mearely."

There was a short, uncomfortable silence, while she twisted about and tossed her head, smiled disagreeably and very knowingly, and tapped her fingers on the arm of the chair. Her motions presently focussed the gaze of the other two upon her with a sort of fascination. She turned, sharply, on Howard:

"Mr. Howard, do you believe that story about the constable?"

"Believe it?" in surprise. "Certainly—er—why not?"

"Does it explain the empty pistol I found on the table?"

He considered briefly.

"No—o. But very possibly it needs no explanation. Rosamond may have drawn the charges herself."

"Oh, mamma, please don't invent any more horrors to-night. I—I—just can't *stand* it." Corinne's voice indicated that she had borne too much. She was smothering an hysterical desire to cry.

"Corinne!" angrily.

"First, Mrs. Mearely had a terrible fright; then she had ptomaine poisoning; next she had been nearly murdered; and the last thing was she had shot herself!"

"Well! everything *pointed* . . ." her mother commenced, indignantly.

Corinne's last vestige of control flew from her. She waved her hands about, in a very fair imitation of her mother's favourite emotional gesticulations, and cried:

"No, it didn't! it didn't! But when you don't *know* anything, you always have to make up things. And half the time you're all wrong. I wish you'd

come home now. Next, you'll be saying *she* sho *him!*"

"Ah ha!" Mrs. Witherby was triumphant. "I *does* look like it, doesn't it? And I intend to remai here until I find out *why* she shot him—this Mr Mills"

Corinne gave a little moan and burst into tears Howard rose abruptly and went to the verandah He almost collided with Constable Marks, wh pushed him aside and marched indoors.

"Here! What are you doing?" Howard aske the intruder, severely, and gripped him by the coat.

"'Ands orf!" Mr. Marks exhibited his badg "Horfcer of the law."

"What is your business here?"

"Hi came about the shoofer as was shot."

"How do *you* know the man was shot?" Mrs Witherby wanted to know.

Constable Marks looked at her, as a brilliant intellect may regard a sample of crass stupidity.

"Who'd know better, Hi'd like to know, than me wot shot 'im? But Hi didn't get 'is nyme."

"His name is Mills," Howard supplied.

Mr. Marks brought out his tablet, wetted his purple pencil, and wrote the name as he conceived it.

"Mills—with two hells?"

"Two hells—I mean, l's! l's!" Mrs. Witherby was

out of patience. "How else on earth would you spell it?"

Howard, with an authoritative gesture, restrained her.

"Two l's. I can't tell you anything more about him. He is a complete stranger to Mrs. Mearely and to all of us. I must say, officer, that you have made a lot of trouble for Mrs. Mearely and all of us, by your reckless shooting—firing at a gentleman, who was riding peaceably along the road!"

Mr. Marks looked up from his note book and stared at Howard in stupefaction.

"Wot d'yer say? Gentleman ridin' peaceable halong the road. Hi likes to know hif you calls *that* peaceable—a-jumpin' on my 'ead."

"*Jumping* on? What do you mean?"

"Hi mean *jumpin' hon my 'ead—that's wot Hi mean.* Dived hoff the porch railin' right on to my 'ead! at two-forty-five in the mornin', too. No wonder Hi takes 'im for a 'ousebreaker."

Mrs. Witherby's eyes glittered. She closed in and plucked him by the sleeve.

"Jumped off the railing, you say? What railing?"

He withdrew the raiment of the law from her desecrating touch, and replied, witheringly.

"*That* railin'. Hi don't see no *hother*—hunless you think Hi means the pearl an' goldin' railin's of 'eaven!—*w'ich Hi don't!* The lady comes runnin'

hout, an' we brings 'im in 'ere. An' 'e turns hout to be the shoofer wot's jest got 'ome, an' was 'avin' 'is bite."

He jerked his thumb toward the supper-tray.

"Chauffeur," Howard repeated. "What made you think he was the chauffeur?"

"Say! Hi'm gettin' provoked with *you!* 'Ow do Hi know 'e's the shoofer? Cos 'e *says* so! An' *she* says so! An' Hi makes my excuses an' takes 'er nyme but forgets to take '*is* nyme. An' that's w'y the chief sends me back 'ere—*if you wants to know.* Hit's a' ~ys reg'lar to get the nyme of a shot party. Tain't hoften Hi shoots a man. W'en Hi do, they likes to 'ave 'is hidentity." He touched his hat. "Halfred Marks is *my* hidentity."

"But Mrs. Mearely *ha.* any chauffeur. What else . . . ?"

Howard stopped her firmly.

"Mrs. Witherby, this is not the time for—that is to say, the constable has made a stupid mistake. Er—constable, you have made an error. The man's name is Mills, and he is an entire stranger to all of us. You will please report that to your chief."

Mr. Marks set his jaw obstinately.

"Jest as you say. But w'en *hentire strangers* takes to divin' hoff porch railin's—*at that time o' night!*—hall Hi feel Hi can say his: hit may be the carefree, heasy manners of the rich, but it *hain't pretty be'aviour!*"

Howard guided him out, with slight but positive shoves.

"That will do, officer. I've given you the facts. Make your report in accordance with them."

"Hall right, sir," offendedly. On the porch he paused to find out the hour. Ere replacing the watch in his pocket he waved it on its cherry loop before Howard's eyes.

"Hi see you're hadmirin' o' this," he began.

"Not at all," curtly. Howard turned his back. Constable Marks gave every sign of a sensitive man under acute insult.

"Ho, *very well!*" he said at last, with great dignity, not unmixed with contempt. "There's some as will be 'aughty to their gryve." With this crushing rebuke he withdrew.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE sombre silence in which the constable departed endured for some time. Mr. Howard folded his arms and stared at the cornice. Mrs. Witherby gleamed upon him, in a mocking triumph which he affected neither to see nor to comprehend the reason for.

"Well, Mr. Howard," she said presently, being no longer able to contain herself, "the plot thickens."

Howard coughed, artificially it must be admitted.

"Er—the fellow's statement—er . . ." he sought to waive it with a waving hand.

"I am very sorry that I brought Corinne. But how could I imagine such a thing of Mrs. Mearely?"

At this there was another wail from Corinne, who was in the dark concerning the cause of this strained situation. To her young mind, the constable's tale brought no black suspicions.

"Oh, mamma! Are you going to invent something *more?*"

"Corinne, be silent. You shall come home with me at once."

Howard saw that something definite must be done immediately. After all, he said to himself, he was the

deceased husband's kinsman and, in an emergency like this, his should be the voice of authority in Villa Rose. *No master* at Villa Rose—there was the whole trouble.

"Mrs. Witherby, kindly listen to me. You are jumping to—er—conclusions hastily and with insufficient grounds. This apparent—tangle—is due to stupidity, of course. It will be cleared up. The important thing is, that this absurd story should not be repeated outside this house."

She raised her eyebrows in simulated amazement at his implied charge.

"Of course *I* shall say nothing. I hope gossip is the *last* thing I shall *ever* be guilty of. But such things reveal themselves, Mr. Howard."

He tried another tack.

"You will please consider Mrs. Mearely's standing in the community. Any aspersions cast on her will ultimately reflect on *you* and on all her friends."

This was a new view to her. Did she really wish to lead a boycott against Villa Rose? She calculated swiftly.

"We must prevent *that* at all hazards," she decided.

"We ought to wire to her sister not to come," Corinne suggested. "Mrs. Mearely is not sick."

"No indeed! It is more necessary than *ever* that she should come *at once*. Until she arrives, *I* will stay here—in a position of authority—then nothing

can possibly be said. I shall go home now and gather up such things as I may need for my brief visit, and return immediately. Corinne, of course, will remain at home."

Howard bowed formally.

"I shall appreciate it. So will Rosamond."

Corinne's face had gone glum at the prospect of being left at home.

"Mamma!" she protested, "*I* want to be in it, too."

"Come, Corinne," solemnly, "and don't argue.'

"I will remain to get the—er—real facts from Rosamond," Howard said pointedly. She nodded.

"Of course. I'm sure you'll hit upon *some* explanation that will do. You're so intelligent. And *I* shall stand by you. Depend on me."

"Mamma, mamma, *why* must I remain at home?" Corinne's voice could be heard, still protesting, as the two women disappeared. After waiting till he heard them drive off, he walked resolutely to the stairway door and rapped on it smartly. He repeated the raps until a voice answered him, joyfully.

"Yes. In a moment, Prince Run-Away."

Howard left the door open and returned to his former position. From the centre of the room, with one hand resting on the solid antique table, and the portrait of Hibbert Mearely behind him, he felt that he should be able to dominate the situation. He

glanced at the painting and his own lip curled thinly. How he had secretly hated that old man, while openly doing him homage! Because of the trivial legacy, how he hated him still!

"You would marry a farmer's daughter!" he thought. "Well, blood will tell. How the disgrace would have stung you! I've no love for you, you callous old skinflint, but I'm a Mearely; and I'll save the family honour from being smeared by buttery fingers."

"Wilton!" Mrs. Mearely was astounded at the sight of him. She hesitated an instant on the threshold, staring at him; then, closing the door, came swiftly toward him.

"What is it? Why are you here?"

He did not answer immediately. His gaze dwelt on her, noting the fact that she still wore her rose-and-silver gown. Before he spoke she had discerned the change in him. In manner he was a replica of Hibbert Mearely.

"Sit down, please." He waited for her to do so. "I have something to say; and it must be said quickly before Mrs. Witherby returns.

"Mrs. Witherby?—returns?" she repeated mechanically.

"Please hear me out. It appears that a man has been shot and brought in here. You sent for the doctor, but omitted to say why. Mrs. Wells supposed that *you* were seriously ill. Knowing that

you were alone, she telephoned Mrs. Witherby, asking her to come to you. Mrs. Witherby, in her turn, called me up, and I came as quickly as I could. I may add, she has also wired for your sister."

She gasped.

"Wilton! What an absurd—what an impertinent thing to do!"

He motioned for silence.

"While we were waiting we found your pistol, then, blood-stains on that chair—which are now explained of course; then—those dishes—plates for two—which are not yet explained. Wait, if you please. Dr. Wells informed us that a Mr. Mills had been shot, accidentally, by a constable, as he was riding along the road . . ."

"Well, surely that is sufficient explanation," she interrupted haughtily, recovering herself. His lids narrowed, and his speech became more incisive and more familiar, without the usual tinge of respect and kinship that, until now, had coloured his accents in converse with her.

"It would be, my dear cousin, but for the entrance of the constable, who gives quite a different version of the affair."

This last piece of information took her off her guard completely. She flattened perceptibly.

"The constable! He came back? Oh dear—oh dear!"

Howard thought she was carrying the affair off very clumsily—quite like a butter-girl, without hereditary finesse.

"He came back—and recited, for Mrs. Witherby's benefit, how he had seen the man on your verandah and fired; how you had run out and brought him in here and told this same constable that the man was your chauffeur. This was plainly—er—an—evasion, as you have no automobile. The Mr. Mills story does not explain the presence of the man on your verandah, at that hour of the morning; nor the supper for two; nor the fact that you are still in the gown you wore last evening, and therefore did not retire immediately after we all took leave, although you complained of fatigue and hurried me away on that account." He paused to let these points sink in. Rosamond began to realize that matters were serious for her, but more so for the prince, who was now in double danger of discovery.

"With Roseborough within, and the Woodse-all-the-rest-of-it secret service outside Villa Rose, how can I save him from arrest?" her anxious thought ran. Howard, knowing naught of His Highness and his vagabond joys, saw that he had made a profound impression and he hastened to follow up his advantage.

"Now, I think I need not impress upon you, the necessity of finding some explanation to cover all

these points before Mrs. Witherby returns, or she will spread a scandal that will ruin you. You know her as well as I do."

She looked at him, growing consternation in her face.

"What *can* I do? His identity must be kept a secret at any cost. You have no idea of the sensation—the upheaval . . . !"

Howard avoided her pleading eyes, with painful delicacy.

"Indeed? He is well known among us, then? a man of position in Roseborough? Married, I presume, or there would be no necessity for this clandestine . . ."

Slowly she rose, staring at him, horrified. Until that moment, she had taken it for granted that only Mrs. Witherby interpreted the prince's midnight advent as a scandal. She had supposed that Howard's whole concern was to prevent the Roseborough gossip from misinterpreting an occurrence which he, as well as his cousin's widow, knew to be innocent. By a word he had awakened her, and she realized that he, too, put the worst construction on the affair.

"Wilton! you can't mean that *you*—that you who know me . . . ! What are you thinking of me?" she demanded passionately.

He was unmoved by this outburst, which he had expected at an earlier stage of their interview; women

always cried "insult," when caught. He replied, coldly, avoiding her eyes, and picking his words with the care and delicate innuendo of a gentleman unfortunately compelled to discuss unseemly matters with a beautiful but obtuse young woman from the peasant sphere:

"I hope you will absolve me from trying to pry into your secrets from any personal motives. My sole aim is to protect your reputation, as far as possible after this indiscretion. The prominence of your position in Roseborough makes it doubly my duty—not only for your sake, but for the community. I can understand that a girl—young and beautiful but not rich—might have a friend—some childhood's sweetheart—who still retained her affection, even after she had married prosperously and above her own station. I can understand that, once having been lifted to a position of importance, she might well hesitate to lose that elevation by marrying the early sweetheart, who has probably remained in his humble sphere—and yet, might yield to her affection for this individual. All that is natural. The thing I deplore is, that you should have been so thoughtless as to send for Dr. Wells. Mrs. Wells and Mrs. Witherby, between them, have notified everyone who possesses a telephone. And, in addition, we have the damning fact to get over, of one story about the gentleman's identity told to the doctor and another

told to the constable. Your friends naturally demand a convincing explanation of a very compromising situation."

She strode toward him, as if she would have enjoyed walking over him and stamping on him, and almost shouted her repudiation of the whole hideous suggestion.

"Oh! this is an outrage! *I never saw this man before in all my life!*"

"What!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. He had thought himself prepared for any and all excuses, but the novelty of this one took him by surprise.

"Oh! Is *this* what you think of me in Roseborough? But, you'll be punished for it—all of you—when the truth is known. You—you—oh! Well, I'll tell you *nothing*. There! I never saw the man before. He came in here, like a tramp, and I fed him. I couldn't tell that to Dr. Wells, or to the constable, could I? *They wouldn't have believed it!*"

"Exactly," he answered, dryly. "And who else will believe it? *No one*. I regret that my offer of assistance has not been met with sincerity."

"You can all think what you please," furiously. "I will not sacrifice him. I'll tell you nothing. He entered my house like a tramp. I had never seen him before."

Mr. Howard felt justified in becoming seriously angry.

"You can hardly complain if I refuse to allow you to sacrifice your honour, and my cousin's name, and the feelings of Roseborough, for a man you yourself say you never saw before to-night!" he asserted, dictatorially.

She stamped her foot.

"I'll tell you nothing of him! He shall not be discovered, and dragged back to his prison. He shall be free."

Howard started. Prison, did she say? Some poaching "rough" from Poplars Vale, perhaps? This threatened to be a scandal indeed, unless he crushed it under an iron heel.

"Prison. Ah. Very well. Now I think I understand this matter."

He walked quickly to the anteroom.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, in new alarm. He gave her a stern look under gathered brows.

"I am going to telephone to the police, and give this fellow in charge as a common housebreaker. If he has been in prison before, let him have another taste of it."

"Wilton!" In the shock of this move she was wordless.

"With the man in gaol, your story may be believed." He closed the door behind him. She ran to it and listened. He was having the usual mid-

night trouble in waking Central. There was only one thing to do; she must get the prince out of the house before stupid, gossiping Roseborough forced him either to declare his identity or go to gaol! If he revealed his name here, he could no longer masquerade as a vagabond and roam the world at will. He would be forced back to his palatial prison in Woodseweedsetisky. It was still dark outside. There was a bare chance that he might elude the black-whiskered secret service, if he could only slip out of the house undetected.

Central still refused to answer.

"Oh, sleep, sleep, Maria Potts!" she invoked. She ran half way up the stairs, calling softly, "Prince Run-away."

"What is it, Madam Make-Believe?" She caught his hand in hers and made him run down the stairs, chattering confusedly to him the while.

"You must get away, for both our sakes. There isn't time to explain."

"I don't understand. Has anything occurred to . . . ?"

"No time to tell you. Things have happened. Oh! *how* things have happened! You must go—go—and be free."

"All right. I'll 'go—go—and be free;' but I'll come back to-morrow and hear all about it."

Together they tiptoed rapidly to the porch—and

almost collapsed upon the broad bosom of Constable Alfred Marks.

"No, you don't, me 'earty!" said the Law. "Hi wants *'im*," he said to Rosamond, jerking his thumb at the prince. "The Chief don't feel contented-like with this affair. There's too many stories habout 'im wot don't hagree. So 'e sends me back 'ere to take *charge* of 'im, and to make a hinvestigation all official and reg'lar."

"*I'll* answer any questions," she pleaded desperately, "but this gentleman must go . . ." The constable silenced her, impressively.

"Hi 'opes 'e wont make no more trouble; cos, if Hi gets to shootin'—*w'ich Hi would*"—he glared to enforce this—"Hi might 'it some of your fondest nicknacks." He pointed his revolver about at the antiques on the walls.

"That is well, officer." Howard stood in the doorway. "The fellow must remain here."

"But, I'm delighted," the Incognito asserted, He addressed Howard, gayly. "You know, this is my second attempt to leave this house. It's an adventure! A house with four doors and seven windows, and yet I absolutely can't get out of it!"

It was plain to Rosamond that, all unaware of his danger, his whimsical nature was delighted with the new and odd turn his fortunes had taken.

"By your leave, ma'am," Mr. Marks pulled the

long bamboo settle across the open width of the double French doors, and sat down, a war-like speck in the centre of it, toying significantly with his weapon.

"Oh, Your Highness, I did my best to save you!" Rosamond whispered, despairingly. She dropped into the nearest chair and softly wept.

CHAPTER XXV

IT TRANSPIRED that Miss Maria Potts had not been asleep, save possibly for a few weary winks. Howard's inability to reach her ear was due not to her slumbers but to the fact that half a dozen other Roseborough citizens were demanding to be connected with Mrs. Mearely's residence. For the first hour of the doctor's absence, Mrs. Wells, muffled in an eider-down wrapper, and topped with a frilled nightcap, had sat at the telephone and called everyone whose number she could remember. There were several whom she did not call, because Peter had mislaid the book. The book in Mrs. Witherby's home, however, was not mislaid; and, as she made Mabel and Corinne do all the packing of her small trunk and her several bandboxes, she herself had time to spend in notifying the persons Mrs. Wells omitted that Mrs. Mearely had been "taken ill and *of course* sent at once for *me* to come and oversee things."

So it was that Mr. Howard had less than five minutes in which to bend his stern, menacing, contemptuous gaze on the interloper, who was not only a poacher in the emotional realm, but, judging by his eccentric attire, was also something of the sort by

field and stream. The instrument behind him tin kled. For the next hour, indeed, it tinkled inces santly. Howard ran back and forth telling soothin fictions to first one and then another; sometime pausing to upbraid the somnolent constable becaus he had not caught the gaol-bird and put leg-irons o him before ever he entered Villa Rose. Constabl Marks, sleeping and waking by jerks, mumble protests. Mrs. Mearely and her guest, discreet seated at opposite sides of the room, were unable t exchange more than a whispered word or two. Hi amused cheerfulness stabbed her to the heart; be cause he did not know his danger. Straining her ea nervously, at times she believed she could hea groans outside—the rumblings of Woodseweedsetis ky's secret service, Teodor Carl Peter Lassanava tiewicz, shot in the leg by Roseborough's huma watchdog, Constable Alfred Marks.

Another tinkle drew Howard from his chaperonin station, just within the doorway. He always le the door open when the bell called him upon thes excursions. The guilty pair could see the back o his head—and be reminded that he had two ear and that only one of them was required for th receiver.

The prince leaned as far out of his chair as h could, without falling out, and whispered across th room:

"Where does *he* come in? And why doesn't he like me?"

"Ssh—!" She held on to the arm of her chair and stretched out her neck and alarmed countenance, for all the world as though she expected to be guillotined "He's a relative—of Mr. Mearely's, and—and—" she stopped, and gestured for silence, thinking that what he overheard of Howard's conversation might enlighten him.

"No, thank you." Howard was repeating what had become a formula; his tones were still unfailingly polite, but weary and suggestive of nerves straining thin under the surface. "Mrs. Mearely is not ill. Just a fright. Mrs. Witherby is *most* kind and considerate, but it was really unnecessary to call you up about it. No. Thank you." He came to the door and addressed Mrs. Mearely, coldly, "That was Mrs. Field. She says she has been trying for half an hour to get this line. Between them, I don't think Mrs. Wells and Mrs. Witherby have overlooked anybody."

Ting-a-ling-a-*ling!* With a barely suppressed sigh Mr. Howard went back to the instrument; absent-mindedly, he closed the door. This time it was Central herself who desired speech with him.

"Land to goodness! Mr. Howard, I'm tuckered out!" she complained, bitterly. "What in creation's happened up to Villa Rose, anyhow? Never, in all my days in this office, have I heard subscribers ramp

round like they been doin' this night. I ain't had a wink of sleep; and maw's jest come and stuck a Dollop's stickem headache plaster on to the back of my neck. I declare I'm weak as a plucked chicken. I give all Roseborough fair warning, right now, that I ain't a-goin' to stand much more of it. Here, hold on. Don't ring off. There's your party." Anon, Howard was answering the same questions in the same wearily courteous manner.

Seeing that the door was closed Rosamond glanced at Marks and knew, by his rhythmic snores, that he was resting peacefully. She whispered:

"There is just one chance . . ."

"I wish you'd tell me what has *happened*. Why are all these people here? Why are you so distressed?"

"Mrs. Wells telephoned everybody that I had been taken ill. Then when Mr. Howard came—and found you—and the constable—goodness knows what they think. They want to have you arrested as a housebreaker."

"How charming! This *is* an adventure." He looked at her, keenly. "Are they gossiping? Ah—I see. Then the best thing, I suppose, is to give up this fun, and tell them who I am."

Forgetting caution in the thrill of his words, she exclaimed aloud:

"Oh Prince! You would make that sacrifice for *me!*" His eyes twinkled with amusement.

"Yes, dear Madam Make-Believe. 'Tis no sacrifice. Their tongues can't hurt *me*."

She shook her head. Not at any price would she sell his dear liberty.

"You can't. It is too dangerous. If you were to confess who you are—now—here—with that awful man in the garden . . ."

He looked as crestfallen as a boy whose long-planned trick deceives no one.

"You know who I am then? You only pretended you didn't?"

"I didn't know, at first. I thought you were just the—the tramp—the vagabond you said you were, till that awful man in the garden came and told me your real name."

"An awful man in the garden told you my real name?" he asked, puzzled. He, too, forgot caution and the whisper. He rose and crossed the room to her, unaware that his moving shadow had flickered upon the screen of Constable Marks's dream.

"Yes; a foreign, guttural, blackish man. He speaks all sorts of languages. He says his name is Lass—Lass—ass—an—a—wiz."

"Lassanavatiewicz?" he exclaimed, in great astonishment.

"Yes. He has come for you."

"Oh! but that's ridiculous!" he asserted, indig-

nantly. "I've committed no crime. He has no right to follow me here. Of all . . . !"

She interrupted him, thinking altogether of the gravity of his situation and the need of haste.

"You must get away secretly, if you can, before the light comes—without his seeing you. I can give some explanation—temporarily. And when the truth comes out, you will be safely out of that man's reach, and everything will be all right for me. Then they will all look foolish, and it will serve them right.'

She led him, both tiptoeing, in front of Constable Marks toward the music room.

"You will find a little alcove window at the end of the music room. Raise it very softly and . . .'

"I have no faith in either your doors or your windows as a means of escape. But I will make the third and last attempt." He whispered this in her ear, with a return of his natural and whimsical manner. They reached the door and opened it with a faint click, since their hands met on the handle. They did not see the Law unveiling its eyes.

"Will it make it better for you if I get away now?" he asked.

"Yes, yes! do it for my sake!"

"Then I'll go." He bent toward her.

"Good-bye, Prince Run-Away." she said, and added wistfully, "Oh, will you ever come again?"

He kissed her.

"This afternoon," he answered; and slipped into the music room quickly, lest she should rebuke him.

"'Alt! 'alt!" Mr. Alfred Marks, it appeared could move suddenly when duty called. He went after the vagabond at a heavy jog-trot, waving his weapon in circles that threatened not only his prisoner, but the lady of the villa and the antiques as well, not to mention portions of Mr. Marks's own anatomy.

"Anything to oblige," the prince said, politely.

"W'ere's the lights in 'ere? If they ain't on in a jiff, Hi *shoots*, and there's no tellin' *wot* Hi'll *'it—maybe nuthin'!*"

Rosamond ran to the switch and turned it. Her vagabond was sitting on the window-sill, laughing.

"I suppose there was a pass-word once, to get out of this house?"

"Oh! how can you joke?" She burst into tears.

"That's wot *Hi* say," the constable concurred. "Wot's frisky habout it? A blamed botheration is wot *you* are; and Hi've 'arf a mind to *tell* you so; 'arf a mind and mebbe a bit more! Come horf o' that there winder-sill and sit hon the piany-stool. Come horf, now. Hi'll sit right 'ere. Hit'll be heasier to hoversee yer 'ere. Ma'am, shut the door. Not honly for syfety's syke—'im bein' such a slipp'ry customer—but the hearly mornin' hair is bad for a sensitive man like wot Hi am hin a draught."

"Rosamond!" She heard Howard's voice, with a

sharpness of authority in it that made her wince. As she returned to the living room, she was mutely imploring that some means might be put into her hands for the adequate and sufficient punishment of this man. She sank down upon the settee and turned her profile to him.

"I grieve to see you in distress," he began very formally. The telephone tinkled. "Ringing off—can't be another connection so soon," he muttered. "For your own sake you must corroborate the story I shall tell." The bell rang again, a longer tinkle. He frowned, but continued. "I have been thinking that it may be best"—the bell was ringing loudly now, Miss Potts losing her patience at the delay—"it may be best to tell Mrs. Witherby . . ." He surrendered and went to answer the call.

Rosamond heard wheels coming up the gravel road but she did not move. All hope of the prince's escape was lost now, and with it all fear for herself. She sat still and limp, humped upon the settee, a symbolic figure of Dejection. Howard, having disposed of the last kind inquirer with less polite circumlocution than usual, re-entered.

"I want to make you understand, my dear Cousin . . ." (Miss Maria Potts inserted the plug again. He scowled, glanced toward the telephone then endeavoured to continue, regardless of the thin but insistent tinkle), "er—that you can rely

on me, to any extent. I am in no haste personally to put the worst construction on this event."

"Oh, really? No?" she hissed at him.

He hesitated, slightly flustered by her accents of scorn and the angry flashing of her eyes. He had thought of her as submissive and ashamed, and prepared to show a proper gratitude to those who were rescuing her from the consequence of her folly. The bell no longer tinkled. It *pealed*—in long and short rhythm, loudly, without punctuation or pause. Howard dashed at the telephone and began a counter ringing to get Central's ear.

"Central. This is Villa Rose. Mr. Howard speaking. This incessant ringing is becoming a nuisance. I must request you not to ring this number again to-night, no matter who asks for it."

"Oh is that so?" Miss Potts snapped back at him. "I guess I'm to sit here forever wrapped round in gran'maw's crazy quilt off my bed, which was the first thing handy when I had to grab somethin' to run in here when that ringing first started to get the doctor. My! land! Nobody into our rooms has had a wink of sleep—maw, nor Susannah nor the dawg neither—he's been growling somethin' fierce. I'm going to switch every last one of them crazy subscribers on to your line, when they asks for it. If you think Maria Potts is the only person that's going to be rung up and pestered you're badly mis-

took. 'Twas Villa Rose's line that started the ruc
tions that's got all Roseborough on the jig, and
figger on keepin' you jest as busy as subscribers keep
me. At that, you're fixed a lot more comfortabl
than I be. I'll bet you've got more on to you tha
a crazy quilt."

"Very well, Central," harshly. "In that cas
I shall leave the receiver off the hook."

"*You're no gent'man!*" she screamed at him.

Howard fulfilled his threat, notwithstanding, an
returned to the downcast but disdainful lady on th
settee.

"I was about to say that we must offer Mr
Witherby a *convincing* explanation—thoroughly co
vincing. Therefore, I say, rely on me wholly an
corroborate what I say."

She gave him a long, cool glance and asked co
temptuously:

"What of another woman's reputation—which it
you who have injured? Why not protect *her?*"

This unexpected counter-stroke took him abac
completely.

"I—er—I fail to apprehend your meaning," h
stammered.

"Oh, people are always ready to sneer at
girl, when a man's attentions don't come to ma
riage."

He felt the red deepening in his face and said—th

more awkwardly because he was trying to appear serene and dominant:

"You said nothing of this to me before."

"No," she answered, reflectively. "*Then* I could have sneered with the rest. I was getting to be like them."

Feeling more at ease immediately, because she had abandoned the subject of Miss Crewe to speak of herself, he attempted a return to his former manner.

"The events of this evening have unstrung you."

She leaped to her feet as if she were about to attack him.

"Unstrung!" she cried. "They've opened my eyes, and the thing I see most clearly is that *I* am nothing. Yes, nothing. A few hours ago I was a much-flattered hostess, the courted mistress of this house, the woman whose word was law in the fashions and entertainments of this community . . ."

"Dear Rosamond, that *is* your position in Roseborough."

"Not any longer . . ."

Whatever she intended to say was forgotten for the moment in the emotions that surged upon her at the spectacle of Thomas Hogworthy, Mrs. Witherby's man-of-all-jobs, with his employer's trunk on his shoulders. It was a small yellow-panelled, tin-plated trunk, with a rounded lid, and well corded

with Hannah Ann's clothesline. He waited on th threshold.

"Good-evening, Thomas. Er—let me see . . . Howard debated whether to send the trunk imme diately to one of the guest rooms, then he though it would please Mrs. Witherby better to select he own chamber. "You had better put the trunk i the dining room just now. That way."

Thomas, a silent man, merely nodded and, settin the trunk on the floor, dragged and bumped it ove polished wood and rare rugs and into the dining roon Then, with a curt nod, he silently departed.

Rosamond's cheeks flamed again with indignatio

"You see! This is no longer my house. *I* am n mistress here. *You* have taken authority over m life. Against my orders, you command the arrest a man you believe I love; Mrs. Witherby sends h trunk into my house, without asking my leave, a comes here herself to stay as long as it pleases her and *you* tell her old Thomas where the trunk is go!" Her anger grew with the enumeration of h wrongs. "And why are you so anxious to save me all of you? For *my* sake? Oh no! Not at a Because of all this—the money and the position. it were Mabel Crewe who had given food to a m during the hours and under the conditions whi society deems improper, would some Mrs. Busybody trunk be dragged across *her* floors—or would you

offering all your fine talents of invention for *her* protection?"

She had made him wince again, and he was angry; but, by an effort, he controlled himself.

"I have not denied that your position makes it more imperative . . ."

Her rage rose hysterically.

"Yes! The position! The woman is nothing. The woman is just a human being, and doesn't count. I'm the—the—axle in Roseborough's wheel. So you'll keep me in my position for your own benefit. The moment I do something which is outside your rules, you seize on my house and my life and—and—force me to save my good name—for you—for *you!*" pointing an accusing forefinger at him. "But you'll regret it! Send him to prison and see what comes of it! It's wicked—wicked. He was so happy and free. And—and . . ." Hot tears, the result of strained nerves and gusts of fury, gushed from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She sobbed, "You'll look per—perfect f-fools!"

Mrs. Witherby now came into view. She was scarcely discernible among leaning towers of bandboxes, and carried a black handbag of the size and shape of a young gondola. Leaning over the verandah railing she admonished the silent Mr. Hogworthy.

"Drive home quickly, Thomas. Miss Corinne

and Miss Mabel are alone. And do not forget a single one of my instructions."

"Mrs. Witherby," Howard warned.

Mrs. Mearely was past caution.

"She is *your* guest, not mine!" She tossed her head, and started for the music room. Alarmed and now thoroughly angry also, at what he considered her stupid and wilful disregard of a delicate situation, he strode forward to intercept her.

"Control yourself," he ordered her, severely. "Control yourself. You can't afford to ignore Mrs. Witherby. I certainly would not advise you to go in there for a *tête-à-tête* at this stage of the proceedings."

This latest caution was the last straw.

"I don't care!" she cried, with rising shrillness. "You—you—have wicked thoughts, You're horrid, *horrid people!*" She rushed out, and slammed the door so vigorously that the antiquities of a thousand years rattled.

"Well!" Mrs. Witherby said, when she could get her breath. "Well! and what have you to say to *that*, Mr. Howard?"

"Er—my cousin is not quite herself—hysterical—er . . ." He lapsed into silence. No one ever maintained an argument against Mrs. Witherby's sniffs.

"You may call it hysteria. I call it ingratitude—

and bad manners But, really! why should one expect Rosamond Cort, of Poplars Vale, to have *innate* manners? (She emphasized "innate" with an inflection all her own.) Where was she to learn them? From her mother—at the butter-tubs?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Witherby, I assure you Rosamond is most grateful—in fact, I might say, almost too grateful. You mistake."

She put an end to his tremulous mumblings, sharply.

"Instead of contradicting me, I'd be obliged if you'd relieve me of my bundles. I've carried them all the way up the hill. No one came to meet me or assist me in any way."

Bowing nervously, Howard seized, from her collection, one bandbox—the largest—and the handbag.

"I apologize a thousand times. My cousin was giving me a description of—er—the events that occurred here to-night. And . . ."

"Kindly be careful with that bandbox," she snapped.

He bowed again, smiling foolishly.

"I beg your pardon. I believe you will find that I have not injured it" He handed it back to her.

"*I* don't want it! The string has cut my fingers. I carried it all the way up the hill. Set it down."

"I beg your—set it down, I believe you said?"

He put the bandbox on the floor, directly betwe them, in the middle of the room. "As I was abo to relate, my cousin has . . ."

"Not there—to be stepped on! Set it under t table."

"Oh, to be sure! Yes. How odd I didn't thi of the table! My cousin . . ."

"Give me my bag again. I need it."

"To be sure!" He bowed and handed her t desired object. She pulled it open, took out a han kerchief, dabbed at her nose, put the handkerchi back and handed the bag again to Howard, who w receiving and surrendering her property mechanical now.

"My cousin has revealed . . ."

She saw his embarrassment and his anxiety conciliate her and she scorned them.

"Well, I hope she has invented some sort of story that people can believe. That's all I ask of he As the mother of Corinne, I think I have the righ to ask that."

He dropped her bag on the bandbox and bega eagerly.

"Indeed you *have*, my dear, kind lady. An you'll be glad to hear that the true story removes al the—the—doubtful appearances."

"Don't put my bag there! Put it *on* the table."

He obeyed hastily.

"I beg your pardon. As I was saying, the *true* story, removes . . ."

She interrupted him impatiently.

"I heard you! Of course I knew your intelligence would be equal to the occasion. I suppose you've got the man out of the way?"

She had removed her wrap and bonnet, and was moving about the room fussily, with little touches at this and little dabs at that, indicating unmistakably that at last a mistress of quality and authority had come to Villa Rose. She turned the Buddha about from one position to another, and finally transferred him to the stand by the settee; she pulled a piece of Sweet William out of the vase of old-fashioned garden flowers, standing there, and draped it over the image's shoulder. She carried an antique copper vase from the mantel to the bookcase, and was obliged to make room for it there by scattering a group of small objects. She managed to crowd them all about the vase, with the exception of a foxhound in green bronze. She finally deposited this animal at the feet of the Buddha.

"I'll have a smart talk with those two lazy maids to-morrow, and find out why they both left the same day as the coachman. I'm more than ever convinced now, that there's something queer about *that*. Of course it would be a dreadful shame to wake Mrs. Lee, yet, if she had a telephone I really would have

called her. She should know about this. Oh, I knew all along that that gaudy frock had not been put on for *my* benefit!" She turned abruptly. "Why don't you tell me what you've done with *the man?*"

Howard, who had several times attempted to speak, and had also been following her spasmodic dashes about the room as best he could, caught up with her now and, making much of the chance to create a sensation, said, with slow impressiveness.

"The man is under arrest."

"*Under arrest!*" An ivory warrior, of the Dynasty of Bing, jumped out of her slackening hand and rolled under the bookcase unheeded. "Under arrest! Good gracious. You must tell me all about it at once. Come into the dining room. I must make myself a pot of tea or I shall be faint. Come at once and tell me."

"Certainly. You must be in possession of all the facts," he said, soothingly.

Dawn was sending opalescent flushes across the horizon and the bird life in the gardens of Roseborough was waking with musical murmurs. Rosamond entered the living room and walked about, dejectedly, turning off the lights. A white mist lay over the river. The air was damp and sweet.

CHAPTER XXVI

ROSAMOND heard wheels and the rattling of milk-pails.

"It must be nearly five," she said.

"Oh, Mrs. Mearely."

She looked up to see Corinne tiptoeing in, with glances daring, mischievous and fearful too; for this most delicious act of disobedience was sure of its tragic sequel. Mabel followed her. There was nothing playful in Miss Crewe's demeanour. She was pale and tense. Her prettily modelled rose-pink lips were compressed into a narrow chalky line. She stood in the doorway, staring at Rosamond as if the lady of Villa Rose were some strange being she had never seen before.

"Oh Mrs. Mearely, I'm so *glad* you're all right. We have been so frightened about you. Mamma ordered me to stay at home—and she wouldn't let Mabel come at all—but we've disobeyed. It'll be awful! But Mamma was so mysterious. I felt that you must be in some trouble and I wanted to be here, even if I couldn't do anything. You know, I . . ." she looked down, shyly, "I think you so beautiful. You mustn't be in trouble."

Rosamond's eyes filled.

"You dear Corinne!" She embraced her warmly. The young girl's childlike tenderness and confidence were very welcome to her in this hour of condemnation.

"We came on the milk-wagon," Corinne explained.

"I heard it—more wheels from Roseborough!"

"We had to shout and run across the field to catch it." She giggled. "Mabel has been all stirred up too. You see we telephoned her, when we thought you were dying, to wire to your sister. Then I told her about Mr. Mills; and what the stupid policeman said about the chauffeur. And she got as excited as I was. Then mamma . . ." She laughed heartily, then stopped herself with two fingers over her mouth, as if she had been guilty of sad irreverence. "Well, *you* know mamma. She has *such* an imagination. And she never can wait to know things. She had you poisoned, murdered, shot, and then she thought you had shot Mr. Mills. And now she says—what do you think?"

"I—I can't imagine," Mrs. Mearely stammered. She tried to smile at Corinne, but she was too conscious of Miss Crewe's hostile gaze and tense mouth. Corinne shrieked joyously at the word.

"Can't *imagine!* No. It takes *mamma* to *imagine!* She said: 'No doubt Mrs. Mearely will announce her engagement to Mr. Howard at once

He'll see his opportunity, and I'll trust him to make the most of it.' Now, can you think of anybody but mamma imagining you'd choose the middle of the night to announce an engagement—even if Mr. Howard's heart wasn't very much engaged elsewhere." She glanced archly over her shoulder at her cousin. "But that's mamma. She *imagines* wonderfully; but she doesn't see things that really happen—right under her nose. Where is she?"

"In the dining room, I think." Rosamond said aloud. Inwardly she was connecting Corinne's repetitions with Mabel's appearance, and questioning, in trepidation, just what Miss Crewe had come there to do.

"I'd better go in and get my scolding now," Corinne rattled on. "Poor mamma. It's naughty of me to laugh at her. But she was *so* excited. Of course, you can't blame mamma for making the most of this. Because it's the first time *anything* has really *happened* in Roseborough."

She ran to the door then back to her cousin.

"I won't tell on you," she promised. "You'll get a worse wigging than I shall." She scampered off on her tiptoes, giggling.

Rosamond decided, presently, that it was unbearable to be stared at as Miss Crewe was staring at her. She would break the silence, no matter what might come afterwards.

"It is very kind of you to come, Miss Crewe. I am sure that . . ."

"Oh what is the use of talking like that! I'm not Corinne. Don't you suppose *I* know the meaning of Aunt Emma's innuendoes and sneers—and her nods and winks? *I've* had years of them. Do you think *I* don't know why she is here—and why she expects the immediate announcement of your engagement?"

"Miss Crewe!"

Ignoring Mrs. Mearely's indignant interruption, Mabel rushed on:

"She'll chaperon and stand by you; and you'll tempt him with your money, to marry you, so that the rich Mrs. Mearely shall not be disgraced. I know!"

Rosamond did not take kindly to criticism at any time. In the last twelve hours she had received enough of it, she felt, to last her a life time. There was something more than offended protest rising in her now. It was *battle* that beat its drums in her temples and her pulses.

"How dare you?" She stepped forward, with her head high.

"Yes! I dare. But don't think it will be so easy." Of a sudden her insolence and derision melted away in suffering. She pleaded. "Oh how can you do it—if you love this other man? You have money.

You can force people to accept him, even if he is a nobody. You don't need to marry Wilton. And you know—everybody knows—that he'd have married me long ago, if we'd had any money." Then she cried out, defiantly: "Don't think you can do it, though! I'll stop it somehow."

The charge that somebody must do something desperate to prevent her from throwing herself into Wilton's arms in order to maintain her standing in Roseborough, set another match to Mrs. Mearely's temper.

"Oh—it's *insufferable!* How dare you and your aunt and such people slander me? The man who entered my house to-night is under arrest."

This was said to wither Mabel. Mrs. Mearely did not think it necessary, therefore, to add that she had tried, by a dozen tricks, to let the prisoner escape. The effect of her dramatic *coup* was the reverse of what she had expected.

"Under arrest! I thought it was only *men* who were cowards in love. If you'll send *him* to gaol, no wonder you'll try to steal the man I love."

Mrs. Mearely could not believe her ears.

"What? Oh! Oh-h!" She wrung her hands. "Do I *have* to bear this?" she asked of the twittering dawn.

"I came here—I hardly know what I hoped. I thought perhaps I could appeal to you, because

you were brave. Yes, even if you were wicked, you were brave, I thought. To dare so much—but . . ." Mabel looked at Rosamond Mearely with the sly, shocked admiration the very correct feel for those who venture to be incorrect in the sphere of morals. Rosamond comprehended the look, and it put her into a fury.

"Oh! I know what you thought. You remembered that I was Rosamond Cort, of Poplars Vale—whose mother sold butter. It was to be expected that I should do something dreadful—and *impolite*. I suppose Roseborough *does* consider that amorous midnight escapades are impolite? But Roseborough isn't surprised at me. Oh, no! All along Roseborough knew that, some time or other, I'd show the butter strain."

Miss Crewe did not know what to make of this.

"Why, Mrs. Mearely!"

Rosamond's rage mounted.

"Oh, yes! Roseborough knew that one day my bran-fed morals would fail, and—and—I'd go to the devil in my own common, *Milky Way*. Moo-Moo-o! That's all I care for Roseborough. It can *cow* me."

"Oh—Mrs. Mearely!"

It was one thing to have a sly admiration for Hibbert Mearely's widow's brave and farm-like *improprieties*—not to use a harsher word—but o

could only be affronted when she forgot that she had left farm *manners* behind her, and put her arms akimbo!

It seemed that Mrs. Mearely had still a great deal to say, with clear, raised voice and hands on her hips.

"I'd rather be descended from good, sweet butter —than—than—be the silly, braying donkeys *you'll* all be to-morrow. I must say I'm surprised at *you*, Miss Crewe—who have had the advantages of high birth, denied to me, not to mention the wonderful opportunity of moral training under Mrs. Witherby —that you should come here and expose your tender feelings for a gentleman, who proposed to me this very evening—*before* all this happened. Where's your ancestral pride? *Before* it happened, he proposed to me."

"He told me he was going to," Mabel answered quietly. She sank into the big chair and leaned her face against the cushioned back. Rosamond stared at her speechlessly.

"He told you?" she repeated, presently.

"Yes. He said we must give up our hopes—and marry money."

"I—*I* was—*Money?*" she gasped.

"Yes. And I said I'd do something to stop it. And I *have!*" She broke down, suddenly, and wept. "Oh, Mrs. Mearely. You don't know what it is to almost have things, and then be pushed aside.

It makes you desperate and wicked. To think th
just because we're poor, we can't marry."

Rosamond stared at her.

"Of course I knew he paid you attentions—bu
had no idea there was really an understandin
Her blankness disappeared before a humiliat
sense of outrage.

"Oh! the insufferable—the wretched, false,
sulting man. To dare to offer himself to me!
the—the . . ." She turned on Mabel. "W
are you crying about? I should think you'd be g
of your escape."

She strode the length of the room and back ag
breaking out in interjections and tumbled phrases

"*I* was Money! How dare he humble me in
fashion? Oh! But I'll be even with him. Oh
I'll find a revenge. I was to be his dear li
Money, eh?"

Mabel' helpless sobbing was reaching her s
pathies and making her doubly angry, because
did not want her sympathies reached. She stam
her foot.

"Stop that crying. Do you hear me? Do
mean to say you can still love the wretch?
can't respect him."

Mabel wiped her eyes, and looked at her curiou

"Oh—respect! I wonder if women ever res
men a great deal. Perhaps that is what ma

them love so much—to make up for the lack. I think men have to respect women. But women just have to love. I love him. I don't know why. Maybe just because he is a man and I'm a woman. One must love somebody."

Rosamond sank down on the settee. During Mabel's words she had been moved increasingly; her heart echoing that the words were true—tragic, but true.

"Oh, yes," she said. "One must love somebody. Oh, yes, Mabel." Tears welled over her own lids.

"It's all over, now," Mabel sobbed. "Even if you don't take Wilton. It's hopeless."

Rosamond's lips quivered.

"Oh, it's very sad to be just a lonely woman in this dreadful little place. And to be young—young! Oh, Mabel, dear!"

"Yes. Yes. Oh, Rosamond!"

"Love only comes in at the window and—and—kisses you—once—and flies away again."

"Flies away again," Mabel echoed. They found, first each other's hands, then each other's arms, and finally grieved upon each other's bosoms contentedly.

"He'll never forgive me for telling," Mabel said. "Oh, Rosamond, you—you—don't want to marry him, do you? Perhaps I ought to try to give him up?"

Mrs. Mearely's injured pride leaped again int wrathy flames.

"Not to me! The wretch! The deceitful, de luding—deluding—de—de—deceitful thing. Ye *thing*. I'd like to make him pay, with his whole lif for the insults he has heaped on me to-night. Even as she wished, the way to realize her desi suggested itself to her. "Ah! I can do it! Ce tainly I can. And you shall help me. He and you aunt are so nice and smug and busy over my affairs— eh? I'll give them a bit of scandal of their own to tal care of. I'll make her writhe. I'll avenge myself. I' make him pay—all his life long. I'll show them a who's who in Roseborough. Let them see if the butte maker's daughter isn't a match for them!" Sh marched—sailed is perhaps the better word—to th door, threw it open and called with a great authorit to the tea-drinking conspirators in the dining roon

"Mrs. Witherby, kindly put *my* cups down on *m* table and come out of *my* dining room."

She walked swiftly to the stand by the settee an picked up the *Digest*. She stood there holding th paper, waiting. Mrs. Witherby looked flustered bu belligerent. Howard was patently apprehensiv Corinne, who had received a terrible scolding, w excited and scared, but not too much so, for sh clung to one of Jemima's fresh cookies and occ sionally nibbled at it.

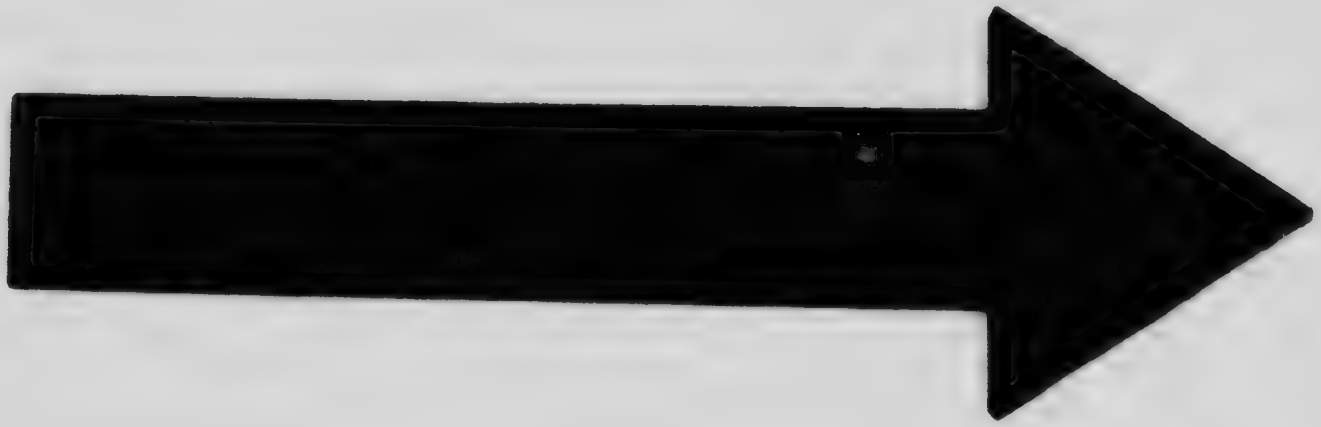
CHAPTER XXVII

MRS. WITHERBY stared the hostess of Villa Rose up and down; but the latter did not quail. She pointed toward a chair with the folded *Digest*.

Now, many a time, while flattering and "my-dearing" the lady of the villa, Mrs. Witherby—secretly chafing because she dared not call her by her Christian name, and patronize her—had wished that an opportunity might arise to enable her to "put the farmer's daughter in her place." In a pitched battle, Mrs. Witherby always won, no matter who her opponent might be, because her tongue and spite were tireless.

"Well! I wondered when you were going to greet me," she began. Her top-knot waved and her silks rustled as she plumed and girded herself for the fray. But the *Digest*, gracefully manipulated, waved her to silence.

"I do not wish to hear you talk. *I* am mistress here, and *I* shall do the talking." She moved, and Mrs. Witherby caught sight of her niece. She darted at her in a fury. At the moment she was at least *capable* of boxing her ears, whether such was her specific intent or not.



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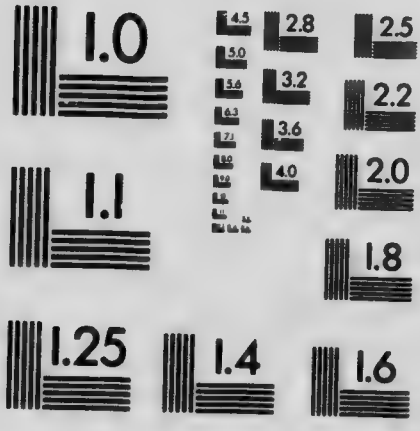

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"Mabel! how dare you disobey me?" she began.

Mrs. Mearely stepped in between and languidl shooed the warlike woman off with the periodical.

"Be silent, if you please. Mabel is my gues She is under my protection." She patted Mabel head. "Don't cry, dear, Don't be afraid. Corinn come and sit by your cousin." She drew Corinn to the spot indicated, despite maternal hands thru out to prevent. "You may sit there—and there She filliped the *Digest* to point out the chairs whe she desired to see Mrs. Witherby and Mr. Howa deposit themselves. Howard sank into his cha quickly, making himself as small as possible to esca the high winds which he saw were about to swe over the landscape. Mrs. Witherby, by no mea subdued as yet, but temporarily nonplussed, s down; but she watched her antagonist with bale eye, waiting for an opening. Mrs. Mearely's justifi wrath burned high and she let the flames spread.

Since Roseborough would have it that she w not a Mearely, nor a legitimate child of Roseborou she would let them all experience the encounter th sought with little Rosamond Cort, the farme daughter, of Poplars Vale, who could fill her t hands with earth and declare "this is my earth— earth I sprang from!" and throw both handfuls anyone who was unnatural enough to look down u her.

"So? You'll come into my house—with your trunks—and take possession, eh? You'll be busy here, will you? You'll tell the whole of Roseborough that Rosamond Cort, whose mother made butter, has gone wrong at last! Yes; the unworthy widow of the distinguished Hibbert Mearely had a lover in her house in the middle of the night." She even went so far as to mimic Mrs. Witherby's unique intonations, as she quoted what that lady might be expected to say in the village.

"'Oh, yes, my dear. Of course I did what I *could* to protect her. They arrested the man—but, of course,'"—with nods and shrugs—"'Well, my dear, after all—*who was she?* Butter, my dear, butter!' Butter, butter!" she hissed it, furiously.

"Oh, I know you—hypocrite! Now I shall give you a lesson. I shall give Roseborough a lesson. The joke will last this community for fifty years. And *maybe* it will cure you of scandal-mongering, though I doubt it. The man—is in there! As long as there was a chance of his escape, I would have protected his *incognito.*" She paused to let the word take effect. Then she floated to the music room door, flung it wide and said, with deliberate impressiveness,

"Will you come here, if you please—*Prince?*"

Corinne and Mabel turned and looked at each other. Mrs. Witherby and Howard sat up and looked at Rosamond.

"Prince!" Mrs. Witherby repeated mechanically

"What is it, Madam Make-Believe?" the princ appeared in the doorway, with the watchful Mark a step behind.

"Come, please—*Prince*." She led him toward th group, taking care to keep slightly aside, and no directly in front of him; for she knew, from Mr Mearely's dissertations on form, that one must neve turn one's back squarely upon royalty.

"Mrs. Witherby—Mr. Howard—this gentlema whom you have insulted as grossly as you have in sulted me—is" (she consulted the paper). "Wait— here it is. This gentleman is His Highness, Princ Adam Lapid, reigning Duke of Woodseweedsetisky. She addressed the Prince, diffidently: "I trust I hav pronounced Your Highness correctly?"

"Er—the pronunciation is perfect. The w's ar generally v's—that is, approximately—but to th Saxon mind, of course, that is mere fussiness." H drew near and murmured for her ear alone. "What the idea?"

She did not hear his query; because she was in th medium stage of a perfect curtsy. He saw her silv draperies spread, like a moonlit breaker flowing t his feet; and he put a hand over his heart and bowe as a prince should—a low and stately bow it was; bu it may have been done to hide the mirth in his eyes

Except to clasp each other's hands, Mabel an

Corinne had not moved. Howard stared. Mrs. Witherby sat rigid, still muttering "prince." The etiquette for the occasion was to be defined by a humbler than they.

Constable Marks moved into the circle, and took up his position a little to the left of His Highness—as the tradition is, for armed guardians of the Crown, the left side being the weaker, because farther from the right arm and, possibly, also, because nearer the heart (so the history of royal love-affairs, with attendant political catastrophes, would suggest). Slowly he removed his broken straw hat and held it stiffly in front of him on his thumb.

Mrs. Witherby half rose, hesitated, got up, and bowed twice. Dissatisfied with that, she attempted a curtsy. Howard was on his feet now, with head inclined in a respectful attitude. The prince honoured Mrs. Witherby by returning her salutations. She shook Corinne's arm.

"Get up. Commoners must rise when princes are about. Haven't you any etiquette?"

A master of ceremonies seemed to have been miraculously provided in the obse us person of Mr. Alfred Marks, a citizen of a land where such as he eat their bread and cheese with a lithographed group of the Royal Family beside the God-Bless-Our-Home motto, over the kitchen table and where the lowliest Whitechapel pushcart man knows the

King's taste in Court procedure and is free to agre with it or not. He spoke now with reproof.

"Somebody ought to give 'Is 'Ighness a seat 'Twouldn't be reg'lar for *me*,—bein' on juty an hactin' as the Royal Guard, so to speak."

Mrs. Witherby, Howard, Corinne, and her cousin all ran to pull up the nearest chair they could la their hands on.

"Oh, really—I beg of you. Just *one*, thank you Won't you be seated again?"

Seeing them hastening to obey, Mr. Marks inter posed again. He spoke severely.

"*Hafter* 'Is 'Ighness!"

Heedless of the general awkwardness of fou persons, thus sharply arrested in half-sitting postures the Royal Guard pulled his kerchief out of his coa pocket and dusted the throne, before assisting th prince to seat himself by shoving it against his knee joints. Then, with a casual gesture, he permitte the others to collapse all the way into their severa chairs.

It is customary for royalty, when not incognito to be discreet and infrequent of utterance. Thi might explain the silence now maintained by th prince, who had shown himself, earlier in the evening to be not only talkative but even merry and prankish His eyes still twinkled occasionally; but he no longe took the initiative in introducing subjects of con

versation. He seemed to prefer to follow Mrs. Mearely's lead. Possibly this was in accordance with some old custom of providing a Talking Woman to do the talking for princes, even as there were once Whipping Boys, who received the princely deserts for bad conduct. He affected not to hear questions, or—murmuring, "Certainly," or "Oh, to be sure"—he referred the query to his Talking Woman for answer.

"I believe you read, earlier in the evening of Prince Adam's adventures." She tapped the *Digest* with her forefinger.

Corinne, unable to contain herself any longer, cried out:

"Prince! *Oh*, I'm so glad you came here! But I just felt sure you would. I said so to Mrs. Mearely." He smiled at her.

Mrs. Witherby's suspicions were awake again.

"May I ask how you knew he was the prince? Of course I don't doubt Your Highness at all. But may we not know how Mrs. Mearely was able to corroborate . . . ?"

The prince bowed to her affably. "Oh, to be sure. Naturally." He looked at Rosamond.

"When His Highness first entered I supposed he was a vagabond. It was dark. When His Highness spoke, of course I recognized that he was not a tramp, but a gentleman."

Mrs. Witherby could not resist a dig.

"*I* should have known that *at once*. Naturall from my station in life."

"Then—when I served the supper, His Highne went into the dining room for a glass of water. Du ing his absence, Captain Lass-an-a-vatiewicz" (sl struggled over the name, but achieved it,) "of the Di lomatic Secret Service of Woodseweedsetisky, came i He had been watching about here all the evenin Mrs. Witherby saw him looking over the railing."

Mrs. Witherby sprang up.

"There! There!" she declared, triumphantl "I told you . . ." She pointed at Howard.

Const ıble Marks rebuked her sternly:

"'Ere, 'ere, now! Less hexcitement and mo hetiquette before 'Is 'Ighness."

When she had subsided, Rosamond continued:

"He told me the real identity of my suppos vagabond . . ."

"The real identity?" the prince questioned.

"I should say he suggested it to me, guardedl by telling me that he was here from—from Woods weedsetisky."

Her eyes besought him to confirm her trembli accents.

"Perfectly pronounced," he murmured. "E cept the w's, of course, as I said before. And t o's and double e's being quite different."

She smiled happily.

"I'm so glad I say it right, now. He said he had come to induce a certain great person to go home to his duties—meaning Prince Adam and his throne."

The prince repeated, in quick surprise:

"To take a certain great person home?"

"Yes. That's how I knew who you were. And he said that he knew the prince would come here to-night, because of His Highness's chivalrous, romantic nature—to protect me, because I was alone."

The prince rose, in his growing astonishment.

"He expected His Highness here? To-night?"

"Yes; and here you are." She beamed.

He sat down again. "I pass," he muttered.

"How wonderful for His Highness to be so understood," Howard commented.

"It must be. It is," His Highness answered. He appeared to be in a brown study.

"I think even Mrs. Witherby must admit that there is no longer a suspicion attached to me. And that the fact that my midnight visitor is PrinceAdam Lapid explains everything perfectly, and clears me."

With a gracious, condescending smile, Mrs. Witherby received her again into the fold.

"Oh, yes. Certainly. Oh, yes, the fact that His Highness is a *prince* clears up—*everything*."

"Ah, then I am royal with reason. I confer reputation on lovely woman—rather reversing historical precedent in that matter."

"But, indeed, our dear Mrs. Mearely has given Your Highness quite an erroneous idea of my friendly ministrations in this house. She is *so* sensitive. *Of course*, no one in this dear old town, where she is so well known, would think for a moment that—that . . ." finding the sentence difficult to complete, she wound up very emphatically—"Er—*No one!* Why don't *you* say something, Mr. Howard? You are our dear Rosamond's cousin."

Mrs. Mearely noted the use of her Christian name, but forbore to administer a snub, knowing that she would soon have a better revenge.

"You seemed to—um—be so full of the right ideas, I could hardly contribute anything," he replied lamely.

"Ah! But there is even a greater surprise in store for our dear, active Mrs. Witherby. His Highness is like a fairy prince. He brings romance to light wherever he goes. Only to-night, Mrs. Witherby said she had a premonition that an engagement would be announced here, before she left this house. How wonderful to have such a prophetic vision. She discerned—in the crystal of her own pure thoughts—that Mr. Howard's bachelor days were over."

She saw that both Mrs. Witherby and Howard started but she gave them no time to interrupt.

"Yes. It is my pride and pleasure, to announce

the engagemen[illegible] dear, considerate fifth cousin —by *marriage*—t[illegible]ny friend and confidante, Miss Mabel Crewe. *How* we have talked secrets to-night, haven't we, Mabel? There! That is a surprise, isn't it, Mrs. Witherby? But, think! How distinguished to have your niece's espousals blessed by royalty! That will give you something to talk about for the next fifty years!"

She had waited a long night for this moment and she made the most of it. Malicious triumph shot electrical sparks from her person. "Call me Rosamond again! Cat!" was in her mind.

One cannot make scenes before royalty. Mrs. Witherby's claws were clipped. She smiled a vinegary smile.

"It is a surprise—indeed. I am glad to learn that the young people are in such affluent circumstances. I hadn't known of their windfall."

Howard cleared his throat.

"I had not expected the—announcement. It is a great honour—er—doubly so—er—under the circumstances."

Corinne embraced her cousin ecstatically.

"Oh, Mabel! Oh—I'm so glad! Oh, Your Highness, it must be wonderful to do such lovely things for people. Perhaps that's why you are called Prince Adam—because you make all things lovely, like the Garden of Eden."

"Dear young lady," he responded; "it is my fond-
est aim to make this world once more an Eden for
everyone." He bowed to Mrs. Witherby, and
amended. "Of course, with certain restrictions—
chiefly in the matter of drapery."

Corinne sighed with extreme joy.

"Oh, it does change *everything* when a Prince comes!"

"For a wedding gift to my dear cousin," Rosamond
said, "I am adding to his future wife's dower. A
Corinne says, it does change everything when
prince comes. I never thought before how much
might give. Come here, Wilton and sit beside her—
and thank your lucky stars. She wants you" sh
muttered, as he passed her, "well, she shall *own* you.

"I do thank my lucky stars, cousin Rosamond,
he answered as he took Mabel's hand. His fa
was dark with the flush of his own contempt. "
am the gainer in every way. I am utterly unworth
of her." Then, as her cold fingers clung tightly
his, he added—speaking to her only, as if he we
determined to put behind him everything else th
had been said and thought in that room during t
night—"perhaps the coming of the prince m
change that, too."

"Oh, dear!" Corinne sighed again, "Mr. Howa
I think you're perfectly nice. But that part does
matter. Everybody will be so glad to see Ma
get what she wants."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A SILENCE of acute embarrassment was happily broken by Mr. Marks. Saluting, he said:

"If Hi may make so bold before 'Is 'Ighness—there'll be no 'oldin' Mrs. Marks w'en she hears of 'Is 'Ighness a-jumpin' on my 'ead, she bein' hambitious."

Mrs. Witherby, who felt dissatisfied with the opportunities accorded her hitherto for impressing His Highness with her character as a gentlewoman all Roseborough delighted to honour, settled herself fussily in her chair and began to discourse, with an air of one who has dwelt much, if not *in* palaces, at least around the corner.

"Your Highness of course is only on a little incognito journey—I presume, to study the conditions of humbler folk. Your Highness will shortly return to his throne, with all its royal splendours?"

He bowed, and in a manner more royally aloof than he had used before—a manner that proclaimed the crowned Ruler—he condescended to converse with her.

"We left our throne somewhat suddenly, because our royal splendours had rather wearied us. Con-

ceive, my dear madam, of having one's every step attended by a score of uniformed menials. Conceive of the infinite ceremony of—let us say—boot-lacing, under the royal system. Contrast it with the ease and privacy with which you, for instance, draw on your fine prunella boots. You are alone. You sit. There is the difficult stoop to bring the boot and the foot into friendly focus. Then the valiant tussle, the gasp, perhaps the stitch in the side—if the weather is warm, the drop of moisture—and the thing is accomplished."

Mrs. Witherby twitched as if she were about to protest sharply, but a cold, lofty look and gesture restrained her.

"If Hi may make so bold as to s'y so, 'Is 'Ighness is a wonderful 'and to describe things. Hi can see 'er doin' of it," Officer Marks snickered reverentially, "beggin' 'Is 'Ighness's pardon."

The prince, regardless of the lady's bristles, elucidated further:

"Whereas, with us, the matter is not so simple. Conceive of a half battalion in livery to find the boots—under the regulations of the Secret Service Department. Two detectives to unravel the laces. Two gentlemen, from the Interstate Commission of Harmony-Producers, to bring the royal feet and royal boots into juxtaposition. Four to incase the feet in the boots. And, say, half a dozen more to

attend to lacing and polishing. So with everything. An army of chemists to test one's toilet waters and perfumes every time one desires a sniff —for fear some anarchist spy may have dropped poison into them. It becomes irksome. And, at times, we steal forth secretly, climb the palace palings, leap across the orchard, open the front gate of our kingdom and stroll forth, incognito—as you see."

Corinne gasped "Isn't it thrilling?"

"Oh, yes," Rosamond breathed.

Mrs. Witherby was anxious to retrieve herself, feeling that her first essay had not resulted greatly to her honour. She smiled respectfully and began again.

"I hope Your Highness will not think me impertinent—but is Your Highness not related to most of the crowned heads of Europe?"

"You perceive resemblances?"

"Oh, *strong* ones!" She tossed her head, delighted with herself for this show of intelligence. "Particularly to the Czar of Russia—and the King of Spain. Also Emperor William—about the eyes. Those are the royalties who are most often photographed in the papers. But I daresay Your Highness resembles all the others, too. I believe you are all related? One hears that said."

"We sprang from a common parent, madam."

Mr. Marks looked about, proudly, and said:

"*Hi* think 'e looks like the *King of Hengland.*" After a brief pause, he added patronizingly, "though the hothers is well enough in their way."

"I trust Your Highness does not find us deficient in etiquette," said Mrs. Witherby. "My late husband's mother once knew a London lady who had been to Court."

"Oh mamma, I'm sure His Highness doesn't care about etiquette, or he wouldn't run away incog," Corinne expostulated.

"Every Court has its rules of etiquette, my dear, and even royalty must conform to them."

Corinne looked disappointed.

"Oh, does Your Highness have to do *just so*—as we do?"

He gave her an affectionate, whimsical glance, and said:

"Yes; but when I put on my crown and climb upon my throne, I write my own rules of Just So. And, what is more, I make everyone conform to them. It is not difficult. Because, when they once understand, they *wish* to conform; and no other rules will do for them at all."

"They must be wonderful laws that people *want* to keep," Mabel thought.

Rosamond, asking for more fairy tales, said:

"Oh, won't Your Highness tell us about your country?"

He took her hands lightly, smiling into her eager eyes:

"'Prince, Prince, how does your garden grow?' It is a great thing to be the prince of one's own little country. There are no prisons; because there are no criminals. That is because everything is freely given. Our financial rating is according to what a man has given." He looked pointedly at the heiress of the Mearely fortune, and added, "No one is proud of being *merely* rich." She blushed faintly and looked down, accepting the suggested rebuke. His regard, with its whimsical seriousness—its blend of humorous comprehension, and confident love, of human nature—sought Mabel's, next. "There are no poor; because they have learned to *love* while they serve—and that makes them rich." He looked at Howard and perhaps he, too, recognized the "product of a bloodless, stagnant village"—blind only because it had not been shown light; for there was no sting in his words: "Love is valued above everything. The love of a girl's heart is more precious to her lover than *much gold*." The lovers' fingers tightened on each other's. "And no one frowns on young chatterboxes or says 'hush! hush!'"

"Oh—h," Corinne sighed again in ecstasy.

"There are no gossips in my country. That is because every child is taught to recite, in its cradle, the articles of the country's Constitution. Every

infant can say 'Oo—goo-goo—goog-ly'—which, when translated, means 'Mind your own business!'" Mrs. Witherby became as flustered as if everyone in Roseborough did not know (from hearing her oft asseverate it) how she despised gossip. The Prince continued: "Observance of this one law has given perfect domestic, social, religious, political, and international harmony."

There was silence for some time after this, while the younger folk, at least, tried to visualize a country where all these things were true. Even Mr. Marks was in dreamland, absent-mindedly chewing his hat-brim and spuffing out the straw chips.

"Hit must be a 'appy neighbour'ood," he said at last, plaintively. His Highness gave him a merry look over his shoulder.

"It is," he said. "All the police are sergeants. They have no weapons. But the government supplies them with a new cherry ribbon for their watch-fobs every Sunday."

Marks saluted, grinning bashfully.

"Oh, tell some more," Corinne urged. "Please Prince, tell some more—about *you*."

"Yes," Rosamond echoed. "Tell some more about you."

"About me?" He looked past the little group, whose limited and selfish ideas of human joy and the means to happiness had brought them into Villa

Rose to know envy and suspicion and to call one another names; and he saw the river and its valley painted by the dawn. Earth and sky were agleam with the fires that precede the rising sun. The rhythms of earth's beauty, flowing to meet and heal the human need, came to his ear in the lilt of a verse such as a child's lips might shape, as it went dancing, barefoot, through the radiant valley.

"I? Why—I am . . ."

I am Prince of the Nameless Land.
  I have set my throne on the azure steep,
And rimmed it round with a starry band,
  For the hearts that stray and the eyes that weep.

Faith rears my walls o'er a garden slope;
My dreams are camped on the hills of Hope;
  White stone is my castle crest.
Peace is my sentry and Mirth my guard,
My gates are wide and my doors unbarred
  For the feet of the human guest.

Joy is my sceptre, and Tenderness
  The crown on my august brow;
The ring on my finger is Gratitude
  To God, who has sealed my vow,
And set his song in my waiting lips,
  His love in my writing hand.
And made me Lord of the Things Men Dream—
  The Prince of their Nameless Land!

The rosy glow from the sky stole into the room; and, to the Nature-man and song-maker, it came like music. So Love had come to him there: at last,

the song with words, fitting the measures of its plain telling to the old rhythms of his daily faith and desire. *She*—the woman—was the gift to him of all the dawns he had watched alone.

A crashing of hoofs on the hill-road called the singer and his companions back to Roseborough.

"What rapid riding!" Mrs. Witherby exclaimed. She went to the verandah, followed by Howard. "Can it be someone coming here?"

"Oh dear!" Corinne sighed. "Roseborough will never see a night like this again."

The prince turned to her abruptly.

"What did you say?"

She looked at him, in surprise at his tone.

"I said we'd never have another wonderful night like this in Roseborough."

"In *Roseborough ?*" he repeated, plainly astonished. "This—this is not Roseborough?"

"But certainly it is," Rosamond answered. "I told you so."

"You told me it was Something Vale. Roseborough!" He stared at her, blankly. "I've been wondering for hours how a house in Something Vale could look down on just the same bit of the river. How is it that *you* . . . ? Really"—he looked in amazement from one to the other—"you know it's very odd to find that I have really been *here* all the time!"

"Quite so," Howard replied, kindly. To Mrs. Witherby he whispered, tapping his brow significantly, "Charming fellow—His Highness—but touched."

"Oh yes!" She agreed, excitedly. "Of course, *I* saw that at once. But royalty *is*, you know. They're all insane. I've always heard that."

The galloping pounded into the driveway and up to the verandah.

"It's Dr. Frei," Howard said.

Frei strode rapidly across the porch, his gaze seeking Rosamond. He wore a long, black, military cloak and a soft black hat. As he swept off his hat, and let the cloak fall back from his arm, he suggested a staff-officer in uniform. A sword-glance was flashed in scathing contempt over all but Mrs. Mearely and the prince. These two were exempt from his anger, because he could feel nothing but tenderness for Rosamond; and the prince he had not yet perceived. That distinguished personage had caught sight of Frei on the verandah and immediately hidden himself behind the door.

"Rosamond!" He called her name feelingly and made his way rapidly to her. He kissed her hand. "Fear no longer. *I* am here."

"Ah, you have heard of the excitement," Mrs. Witherby began.

He silenced her with a gesture so commanding,

that she continued to stare at his hand for several seconds afterward. His eyes blazed, his whole body quivered with the excess of his emotion.

"Yes! I have heard it! First from Herr Ruggle, of the telegraph, when together we reach for our milk pails on the back of the porch. Then from Dr. Wells. Finally from everybody! I have heard how this beautiful Rosamond, of Roseborough, has been suspected, maligned; her reputation slandered, ruined—*criticized—criticized*"—he hissed out the word with uncontrollable fury—"by you—and you—and you," snapping his fingers right and left. "Yes, criticized! and why? why?" Glaring, he paused for emphasis. "Because a gentleman calls upon her, at his convenience! What is more natural?" scornfully. "Two—three o'clock in the morning—these are not *your* hours for visiting? *No!* I can believe that!" with seething contempt. "With you—*with you*—it must be *just so*. Bah! With me, if I am wakeful and I wish to visit some friend at three o'clock in the morning, immediately I ring my bell, I wake everybody, I am dressed, I demand the carriage or the automobile, or the aeroplane, and I go to visit my friend. I wish to visit, and I visit! *What is more natural?* Does the clock rule the inclinations or the reputations? Absurdity!"

While he drew breath, Rosamond said quickly:

"They know now. It's all explained."

"Certainly. *I* have come to make the explanation. For your sake only. I detest criticism. I do nothing for people who criticize. If I can make great trouble for them, I do so. Always. But for you, whose heart is torn, bleeding, from their criticisms, I make the great sacrifice. I renounce my incognito. I take you under my protection."

The word "incognito" is an unusual one to hear bandied about in a peaceful village like Roseborough, and would be sure to produce its effect at any time; but hardly such an effect as was produced by Dr. Frei's use of it now. Everyone stared at him, then at one another and back at him; that is, everyone but Mrs. Mearely, who had long ago convinced herself that Dr. Frei was some noted violin virtuoso who had come to peaceful Roseborough to recover his health.

His manner changed. The feverish excitement of the furious avenger (on critics) faded. With lifted head—yet not assertively lifted, but held high with an hereditary and inbred dignity—and the quiet accents of habitual and unquestioned authority, he said:

"I am Adam, Prince of Woodseweedsetisky." He pronounced it as if it were written Vode-s'-vade-s'-teesky.

There is a common phrase for describing a blank silence after a shock; "one could have heard a pin

drop." In the silen e that filled Villa Rose, one could feel the temperature drop. In time, Rosamond found her faculties of speech.

"Er—er—it's very good of you, Dr. Frei, to attempt this—er—masquerade for my sake. But my reputation has already been saved—by Prince Adam of—Woodse . . ."

"Vode-s'-vade-s'-teesky."

"Ye—es. The real Prince Adam is here." She looked about for her prince.

"Hi found 'im. 'Ere's 'Is 'Ighness—'idin' up 'ere."

His Highness, the Vagabond, perforce stepped out of his concealment into Dr. Frei's ken. He bowed to him ceremoniously, respectfully, yet with a sparkle of mirth in his eye.

"This is Prince Adam," Mrs. Me.. ely said.

"At your service," he said, to Frei.

"Ach! no! This is too much!" Frei stormed at him. "The fountain! You criticized me because the water did not arrive to spout. I put you in the prison and now you come out and say you are me. Oh no! You are not me. *Who* you are, I forget. I purposely forget, because you are of no importance whatever. But you are not *me*." He stopped, breathing heavily and glaring.

"This needs clearing up," Mrs. Witherby said. She looked at Mrs. Mearely and her vagabond, and said it very positively.

As if in answer, the thickset figure of Teodor Carl Peter Lassanavatiewicz stumbled across the porch and into the room. He burst into sobs at the near view of his Sovereign. He rushed to Frei, fell on his knees—despite the wound he groaned at—and kissed his hands.

"*Ach! Ich habe Sie gefunden.* It is thou. All night have I in the wet grass and hard roads waited. But I have fallen asleep." He caught sight of the vagabond and exploded, in angry astonishment, "*Der Anarchist! der Teufel!*"

Frei, deeply moved, looked down upon him.

"Ah—is it thou, my faithful Teodor?" Emotionally, with wet eyes, he indicated the kneeling figure to the silent group in Villa Rose. "Always he is searching the world for me! Ah—ah—so faithful! Faithful Teodor." He observed a white linen strip about the faithful one's nether limb. "You are *wounded?*" he cried, in dismay.

Indignation sounded through the kneeling man's sobs.

"I—I have been abominably—execrably wounded in the leg."

"Ah—ah! Poor Teodor."

"You will go home with me? You will at last marry the Princess Olga, who adores you?"

"Yes, yes," soothingly. "We will go home. We will marry her." He sighed. "She will say she

adores me. She has been well brought up." H
turned his attention once more to Roseborough an
the present. "Farewell," he said—his expressio
was grieved and disdainful—"I go—without regrets
Here, where I thought was my journey's end, I hav
heard most cruel criticism. It is the world. Every
where the same. I go back to my own country
where I can put the critics in the *prison!*"

The vagabond asked meekly:

"If Your Highness will be so kind as to introduc
me and vouch for my respectability—for Mrs
Mearely's sake . . ."

Prince Adam bent upon him imperious looks o
intense dislike.

"For Mrs. Mearely, nothing is needed. You—
and you"—pointing at the offenders, chief of whom
he rightly considered to be Mrs. Witherby—"de
stroyed her reputation. But I have given her a new
one. She needs no more. Now, those, who ab
surdly criticized her, are at her feet in apologies
They will humble themselves before her always."

"Nay, Your Highness," replied the vagabond
who had read the signs more clearly. In spite o
himself, the whimsical strain came uppermost
"Here also, water will not run uphill—not even t
oblige a prince."

"I say, I do not know you!" Prince Adam thun
dered, "You are an anarchist and a critic. Fro

you I have received this false tale of a place where 'all hearts are tender and sincere.' Roseborough! Ah! bah! You are my evil genius. I repudiate you. Before all, I say I do not know this man."

He took Rosamond's hand and, with profound reverence, kissed it. "Rosamond," he repeated her name feelingly, "I cannot take you where I am going. Besides, now I shall marry Princess Olga, and it is even possible she would not wish you to be with me. You will remain forever in my memory—my one true dream, the perfect melody I heard but could not keep. Farewell."

He saluted the others distantly. "Madame. Ladies. Herr Howard." He marched out with swift step, but stopped suddenly on the verandah, remembering the wounded Lassanavatiewicz limping behind. "Come, my Teodor. Come my Teodor. Ah—ah—so faithful." He put his arm about his Teodor's shoulder an instant, as the latter lifted his bandaged leg over the threshold, an act of condescension which caused Lassanavatiewicz to weep devotedly. Prince Adam crossed the verandah and passed from view without a backward glance.

Mr. Marks, alone of those in the living room of Villa Rose, had comments to make immediately, and his were personal. He was divided between pleasure at having actually hit Lassanavatiewicz and chagrin at having only grazed him.

"That's wot 'appens w'en foreigners goes hup against *Henglish* guns," he said proudly; and, at once, added disappointedly "But Hi *do* wish my *aim* was better. *Hi* do wish *that.*"

Thought in Roseborough usually moved like molasses below zero, even when Roseborough had not been up all night. It should have been easy, otherwise, for Mrs. Witherby or Mrs. Mearely to identify the pseudo prince from some of the phrases in the real prince's tirade against him. One or two phrases uttered by Prince Adam, however, could not make Mrs. Mearely forget that she had been deceived; nor could they enlighten Mrs. Witherby, who found it more enjoyable to revive all her old suspicions—which dated, and gathered momentum from the absence of Amanda, Jemima and Blake and the simultaneous appearance of the rose-and-silver gown. She recalled the sly jibes she had been obliged to bear submissively rather than offend Royalty, and her temper flew to the masthead like a regatta display—all primary colours, and chiefly red. She hurled her fury first upon the vagabond:

"Oh, the miserable upstart! The thief! The villain! As to *you*, Mrs. Mearely, let us see if you hold your head high in Roseborough after the tale I'll tell. You'll make a fool of me, will you, with your 'prince'? Oh, indeed! Let me tell you, you never have a reputation again. I know you. The

ing to escape with such tales. You villain! You counterfeiter! Oh! When I think how I've scraped and kow-towed to you!" She concluded with a direct attack upon the mock prince, even as she had begun.

"'*Im* thinkin' 'e looks like the *King of Hengland!*" Officer Marks was bellicose about that delusion, "'E's a *himpostor!*"

The vagabond was prevented from offering a third interpretation of himself by Mrs. Lee's advent. She came in, all tender distress, and put her arms about Rosamond as if to protect something precious to herself.

"Oh, my dear. You are all right, unhurt? Susannah Potts stopped just now, and told me of your fright—the excitement—and, oh, such a tale! She was on her way to do a day's cleaning at the Kilroys, and saw me in my garden, and told me that Maria had sat up in a bedquilt all night at the telephone, and had rung your number twenty-nine times! When one has no telephone one misses a great deal. But you should have sent someone to wake me. It was just your sweet thoughtfulness, not to break an old woman's sleep." She patted Rosamond's cheek.

The vagabond had watched her, from the moment of her appearance, with affectionate eyes. He stepped forward now. Sixteen years had changed him—turned a long, slender boy into a compact

broad-shouldered man, written in his face much more than the simple tales of the First Primer. Had they met on the road, she might not have known him. It was not his outward person that she recognized now; but she knew that attitude of head held forward and bent in humility; hands thrust deep into coat pockets, and black eyes, apparently downcast, but in reality gleaming through half-closed lids, while he mutely asked pardon for some outrageous prank, and at the same time flashed the impudent news that he would not undo it if he could, no, not for a wilderness of monkeys.

"Who *was* the dreadful man," Mrs. Lee was asking when she caught sight of him. "Why—who—who? Jack! Jack, my dear boy—Oh, my dear boy." She went to him with open arms and embraced him and crooned over him.

"Yes, Mother Lee. I'm home again." He kissed her cheek. "But you didn't tell me that you don't live *here* any more! So it was I, Mother Lee. I was the tramp."

"Oh Jack!" she laughed happily, though her eyes were wet. "And then you told some story and kept it up. Just the same, naughty Jack." She held his arm in hers as she beamed delightedly at the others. "So now you all know one another, and I needn't make any introductions. And see how wonderfully it came about, too—just as I longed to have it, Mrs.

Mearely! My Jack and Roseborough met without knowing that they were Jack Falcon and Roseborough, and so they found out each other's true selves at once. How beautiful!"

She was leaning to gaze into his face with loving look, and so did not see that everyone, but Corinne, sought some spot for view where eyes would not be encountered. Constable Marks, having no cause for moral sensitiveness, put his battered straw hat on and took it off again in punctilious greeting to the new arrival.

"Hi'm 'appy to welcome you 'ome, Sir. Hi'll be goin' along, now, to tell Mrs. Marks as 'ow Hi was almost the *first* to greet you. She halways 'as a 'ankerin' to see me prominent." He drew out his watch. "Nigh on my breakfast time."

"Good day, *sergeant*," Falcon called after him, good humouredly. Constable Halfred Marks grinned sheepishly and departed.

Presently Mabel gave words to the thought in everyone's mind, but Mrs. Lee's and Corinne's. She said:

"And we've all got to live here *knowing each other!*"

"Won't that be wholesome?" Falcon said cheerily.

Corinne could contain herself no longer.

"Oh Goody! Oh, to think the prince is going to stay in Roseborough! Prince Falcon! And, oh,

Mrs. Lee, Mabel's going to marry Mr. Howard—at *last!*"

"Oh, how glad I am!" Mrs. Lee embraced Mabel. "Two dear young people. Such an unselfish girl, always labouring for dear aunt Emma and Corinne. How often I've prayed, 'May that sweet, unselfish girl get a good husband.'" She shook hands with Howard.

"I—I didn't know anybody ever noticed me," Mabel answered, with quivering lip.

"How glad our dear Mrs. Witherby must be. I know what joy she feels. She is always more interested in others than in her own affairs."

Mrs. Witherby hunted for her handkerchief, sniffling with unexpected emotion, and faltered:

"Her father was my favourite brother—my favourite."

"And now you'll all meet at breakfast as dear friends, and not strangers. But that is the spirit of Roseborough. Jack, perhaps you'll find that all your wandering has only led you safely home. Somewhere, dear boy, even you must find your end-of-journeying. You remember the words: 'Dear Roseborough, to every seeker of harmony thou art his end-of-journeying; to every wanderer, his home'?"

"My 'end-of-journeying'!" he repeated, and looked at Rosamond, who had stolen away from the room to the verandah.

The golden light of the risen sun filled the open spaces of the garden and sought for chinks and window holes in the great elms, through which to send its warm yellow shafts into Villa Rose. Falcon went out to the railing, and looked down. The sun was splashing all the hillside with glory; and the river flowed like golden glass.

Mrs. Witherby was repeating something she had evolved, at last, as the perfect explanation of "all our little mistakes last night."

"If only it hadn't happened in the *night!* I'm sure *I* would *never* have thought—I'm the *last* person to. . . . But when things happen *in the night!*"

Mrs. Lee had joined her boy on the verandah. She pointed to the sunlight that now burst through the elms in a dozen places.

"But the night is past," she said comfortingly.

Rosamond, lifting her face to let the midsummer morning sky shower its splendour on her, echoed softly:

"Yes—the night is past."

Falcon turned to her. He heard the secret call in her low note, the human undertone of the high wind-swung song of the nests.

Their eyes met. Their youth—and the joy and the hope of it—leaped in them, and they smiled wonderingly at each other.

With a buoyant, compelling movement Falc
went to her, under her golden leaf-laced veil of su
and gripped her hand in the firm, warm clasp of
comrade who has sought long and will never let go
the mate he has found.

"Night *is* past—*Good-morning, Rosamond!*"

They laughed for sheer gladness.

THE END

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